WORLD CLASS ACADEMY

SPRING 2025 NEWSLETTER



ACADEMICS

Letter from the VP
The College Essay
Teacher Features
Student Sonnets
Senior Capstone

ATHLETICS

Quarter Destinations
WCA Surf Academy
Head Coach Feature
Big Air Fundraiser
Photo Gallery

CHARACTER

Meet the Heads of School
Graduation Sneak Peek
Senior Post Grad Plans
Program Director Feature
Student Spotlights



Jack Salmon

CONTENTS

Quarter Three Destinations 3

Quarter Four Destinations 4

Graduation Sneak Peek 5

Teacher: Domingo Sandoval.....8

MTB Sonnets 11

Photo Gallery 13

Head Coach: Lohan Lizin 18

College Essay: Jackie Kimmel ...22

Kite: Fundraising 24

PTWA: Ruby Williams 27

MTB: Mattson Clement 30

Meet the Heads of School 32

Kite: Senior Capstone 36

Surf Academy Launch 37

Climb: Addy Kreidel.....39

Program Director: Hannah Tay..42

Teacher: Millie Alderidge 44

PTWA Leadership 46

Seniors: What Next? 48



LETTER FROM THE VICE PRINCIPAL

As we step into the fourth and final quarter of the year, we find ourselves at a remarkable place of reflection, celebration, and anticipation. The experience at World Class Academy is unlike any other, offering students the unique opportunity to meet extraordinary people, immerse themselves in diverse cultures, and pursue their passions in some of the most amazing locations on the planet.

This final quarter is particularly special. It is a time when lessons learned on the water and in the mountains solidify into lifelong skills. It is a time when friendships and connections, formed through a year full of many highs and probably some lows, become bonds that extend far beyond our time at school.

For our soon to be graduates and many students, this quarter marks the final chapter of their WCA experience, a culmination of their growth, experiences and the adventure we all went on. Know that while this chapter is closing, your journey is far from over. The world awaits, and you are prepared to take it on with the same interest, determination, and passion that have defined your time at WCA.

World Class Academy is more than a school, it is a place where learning extends beyond the classroom and takes shape in the experiences we share and the landscapes we explore. As we head into these last months together, I'll leave you with the same advice I give every program I visit. Embrace every moment in this program, take advantage of every opportunity, every rapid, climb, trail, jump, or human connection. I promise you will cherish these moments forever.

We are proud of each of you and excited for what lies ahead. Let's make this final quarter one to remember.

Evan Smith

Evan Smith

2025 BEGAN IN . . .



Geyikbayiri, Turkey where the Climbers built a strong base for projecting, visited ancient cities, played tourist, and dined on fresh and nutritious mediterranean food



Bio Bio, Chile where PTWA gathered for the first time this school year, building chemistry as a team, traveling to different watersheds, and studying the impacts of the Bio Bio dam



Quijos Valley, Ecuador where the kayakers enjoyed a variety of daily paddling options, south american jungle living, and a moving service project day, removing trash from a river threatened by alluvial mining



Queenstown, New Zealand where the bikers took advantage of their bread and butter dirt jumps and lift access riding while cooking in community and exploring the South Island



Witsand, South Africa where the kiters experienced great winds, lots of big air practice and welcoming hosts while giving back through their annual service learning experience with the 9 miles project

AND CONTINUED IN...

Peebles, Scotland where the bikers trained for Summer races in the birthplace of enduro riding, exploring a new destination for the MTB Academy and the hometown of Head Coach, Josh Noble



Western Sahara and Tarifa, Spain where the kiters transitioned from desert winds to a classic Spanish locale where the team hosted a Junior Big Air Competition with 20 junior participants



The European Alps where the kayakers travelled to Germany, Slovenia, Italy and Austria, chasing Europe's best springtime paddling and visiting Venice for a fruitful cultural experience



Arco, Italy where the Climbers experienced the birthplace of European sport climbing on smooth limestone rock and enjoyed neverending access to gelato in a quaint Italian town



West Coast, USA where PTWA Youth travelled to major Western river drainages, surfing big waves on high water and preparing for the Klamath River first descent



GRADUATION SNEAK PEEK

World Class Academy graduation is a joyous and meaningful tradition that students and families remember for many years to come.

The purpose of graduation is to celebrate all our students, not just those graduating, and to commemorate the adventure of a lifetime. Each WCA graduation includes a parent appreciation dinner and Saturday morning ceremony. Program Directors speak about the year, followed by a short speech about each student delivered by the individual students' mentor. Finally, each senior delivers a speech and graduates receive their diplomas, moving on from their high school experience and into the next chapter.





CLIMB: ARCO, ITALY

The Climbing Academy's graduation ceremony is located at the picturesque Arciduca Beer Garden e Ristorante, located alongside this family run inn. Surrounded by trees and a lush garden, students have their ceremony on this outdoor patio. Afterwards, there is a yearbook signing and a buffet including Italian arancini, zucchini and eggplant rolls, Italian pinzimonio, caprese salads, bread, pasta, fresh fruits and vegetables, and at least 3 desserts.







KAYAK: HAIMING, AUSTRIA

The Kayak Academy starts graduation weekend with an opportunity to for families to enjoy a guided raft trip down the Inn River, paddling alongside students and a few brave parents in kayaks. Parent appreciation BBQ dinner takes place at the takeout for the river at Rafting Alm Hotel where the team and families mingle, watch the video edits from the school year, and may stick around for an evening sauna. The graduation ceremony takes place several blocks away at the Haiming City Hall building.



MTB: TWEED VALLEY, SCOTLAND

The Mountain Bike Academy celebrates graduation at the Macdonald Cardrona Hotel. The hotel proudly prepares classic Scottish food, in their words: "the best of the British bounty and Scottish heritage products." The weekend is highlighted by the annual family ride, where all family members are invited to join the students on the Glentress Trail System to get out the pre-graduation gitters.



KITE: TARIFA, SPAIN

The Kite Academy graduation all happens in view of the sea. Families will gather at the school lodging for complimentary drinks and canapes on Friday night. The Saturday morning graduation ceremony will take place at Restaurante El Tereso experience, overlooking the Spanish coast.







Sawyer Wolfe

TEACHER FEATURE DOMINGO SANDOVAL

In September of 2015, sixteen-year-old Domingo Sandoval left his hometown of Santiago, Chile, and traveled over 5,000 miles to the bucolic Ottawa River Valley in Ontario, Canada. He was there to spend a semester of his Junior year at World Class Kayak Academy. Growing up in the busy Chilean capital city, Domingo spent many weekends on the nearby Maipo River with his father, a former raft guide, and brother, former WCA student and faculty member, Santiago Sandoval. Those early family trips turned into a lifelong paddling partnership between Domingo and his brother, especially once he began paddling independently alongside his brother. “We pushed each other and supported each other. It made a huge difference.”

During his semester as a student at World Class, Domingo quickly realized he was stepping into something special. “I remember being blown away by the level of kayaking among the students—and the staff,” he says. But it wasn’t just about the sport. The experience opened his eyes to new possibilities in both kayaking and academics. One teacher in particular—his physics instructor, who was also an elite kayaker—had a lasting impact. “He showed me that you can be an amazing paddler and still pursue a full-on academic career,” Domingo says. That model inspired Domingo to study physics, ultimately earning a bachelor's degree and focusing his thesis on geophysics. “It really set me on a path, not just for kayaking, but for life.”

Nine years after that first semester, Domingo returned to the Ottawa River Valley —this time not as a student, but as a teacher. He now teaches AP Physics, and AP Calculus AB & BC at World Class Academy. His students see in him not just a coach or educator, but someone who fully embodies the philosophy he preaches: that progress, presence, and passion matter more than raw performance.

“There are no students who are bad at math or physics,” he says. “It’s just about how you approach it—and how it’s taught.” Domingo draws on his own challenges and triumphs as a student to help others navigate theirs. “I wasn’t a strong math student at first. But I learned through hard classes, needing help, and learning to ask for it. That humility—it's everything.”

At World Class, Domingo encourages a holistic approach to growth, both on and off the river. Whether students are dropping 30-foot waterfalls or catching class II eddies, he keeps the focus on intentional improvement. “We’re all in different spots in our kayaking careers,” he says. “Some students are just starting, others are really strong, but for all of them, being conscious of their progress is what matters.” His own daily rituals—stretching in the sun, listening to good music, and sharing a cup of maté—reflect a grounded mindset. In a fast-paced academic and athletic environment, Domingo gently reminds his students and colleagues alike: there’s nothing worth doing that sacrifices being present, enjoying the little things, and taking time to appreciate your surroundings.

Domingo’s influence as a teacher extends far beyond the classroom or the riverbank. His background in competitive gymnastics —something he began in second grade and stuck with through adolescence— shapes the way he teaches and approaches kayaking.



Domingo taking a daily cold dip in Lago de Toro, Patagonia

Arno Reblin

"Gymnastics taught me that everything takes practice," he explains. "You approach skills step by step, methodically. That mindset really carried over into kayaking for me." It's a philosophy that stands in contrast to the often improvisational, flow-based mentality common in whitewater sports. Instead of relying purely on feel, Domingo emphasizes preparation, self-awareness, and incremental growth. "It's not just about sending it—it's about asking, what do I need to do first to get where I want to go?"

This thoughtful approach defines not just his teaching, but also his interactions with students. Whether he's guiding someone through a challenging physics problem or coaching a freestyle move on the river, Domingo is quick to shift the focus away from competition and toward personal development.

"My favorite part of the job is watching students recognize their own progress," he says. "When it clicks for them—when they're proud of what they've learned or what they just did on the river—that's everything."

Coming back to World Class Academy as a teacher has given Domingo a new appreciation for the program that first shaped him. "Being a student here was incredible, but returning as a teacher gave me a whole new perspective," he says. "You see what students are going through, and how meaningful this experience really is. It's intense. It's transformative. And it's something they'll carry with them for a long time."



Niilo Caboussat

SONNETS

WRITTEN BY STUDENTS IN ALLY FALLER'S COMPARATIVE LITERATURE CLASS AND HANNAH TAY'S LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAS CLASS IN CONJUNCTION WITH READING SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDY, *TWELFTH NIGHT*

UNTITLED
by Greyson Gerber

When it rains everything is grim and gray.
People associate that with sadness,
but gray is a color, and it won't stay.
Rain is a blanket, quiet, like madness.

People stay inside—maybe there is peace.
The world takes a breather, and so do I.
It is tranquil and my mind needs to cease
Maybe it will quiet, or at least try

Or not—I will descend into the mass,
blending in unlike the patter of rain.
Without rain, my mind would shatter like glass
Worse than death, that is unbearable pain.

However no matter the drought, rain comes
Slowly at first, but then it will sound like drums

TIME
by Tatum Marsh

Days are painfully long, but years are brief—
how much time is spent waiting for change?
Thinking solely of memories laced with grief,
and what the future will or won't arrange.

To desire knowledge, where circumstance leads,
the mountain Peak is miles yet away.
Only worrying about what will exceed
trudging on, not centering on what to convey.

Looking back to the days where blue birds flew,
the misty summit no longer as far away.
I wonder if I could have done as they did, too,
but instead I'm left to wander, astray.

If the time were to cease, mistakenly rushed,
The bliss of incredulity would remain untouched

JOSH'S NOBILITY
by Andrew Russel

Upon the rugged trails of scotland's land
A rider named Josh Noble rips the bike
And on his bike, a lyrik, not a pike
His riding style's loose and fast, and grand
He likes the roots and rocks, but not the sand
Some say that he can even ride a trike
And when he's not riding he's on a hike
Where others struggle, only Josh'll withstand

His strength and skill is a sight to behold
He rides the trails with such effortless grace
To conquer all the mountains, brave and bold
A big smile across his youthful face
Oh no, Josh is not yet getting that old
Yes, Josh has many years to keep his pace

STUDENT WORK: MTB

AFLOAT IN MEMORY
by Ricardo Castro

Upon the lake, the boat begins to glide,
Its fiber frame creaks with tales once told.
It rocked with joy and pain we could not hide,
A quiet friend through summers, young and old.

Its sides have felt the splash of each new year,
The laughs, the fights, the times we held on tight.
It saw me weak, yet standing through it all.
Like steady arms, it held me through the night.

The sun would paint the waves in golden rays,
And time would drift like leaves upon the breeze.
Though years moved fast, the boat would still enfold,
Each memory with calm and gentle ease.

So when I'm lost, I find this place once more,
Now just a ghost, the boat I still adore.

A LETTER TO A LIVING GHOST
by Ella Easton

I try not to see you in the rain—
it rained all the last weeks, before the end.
Should I have taken that as an omen?
Maybe, but we were doomed before it came.
I knew all along–for my eyes watered
when we first touched. Utterly unaware
‘til tides turned red to reveal despair,
And the naive little lambs were slaughtered.

You are not dead, but still your ghost haunts me.
Not only in physicality–places we met–
when the loneliness rushes in, I see
myself (alone) face to face with regret.
Do you feel it too? Or do you feel free?
If you do respond, I’ll strive to forget.

GRADE 12
By Lola Wais

For all days I can recall, you were here,
you made all my days feel like summer sun.
But not anymore and that gives me fear
and now you are gone, and that is no fun.

I walk alone through halls that knew your name
and all the memories come flooding back.
I try to smile, but it is just a game
cause this good thing’s buried beneath the stack.

Your old jersey hanging up in my room,
holding our emotions from last season.
I wish the year had not gone by so soon,
the memories were cherished with reason.

you can't play here anymore, so they say,
yet somehow you show up every game day.

MEDIA CLASS PHOTO GALLERY



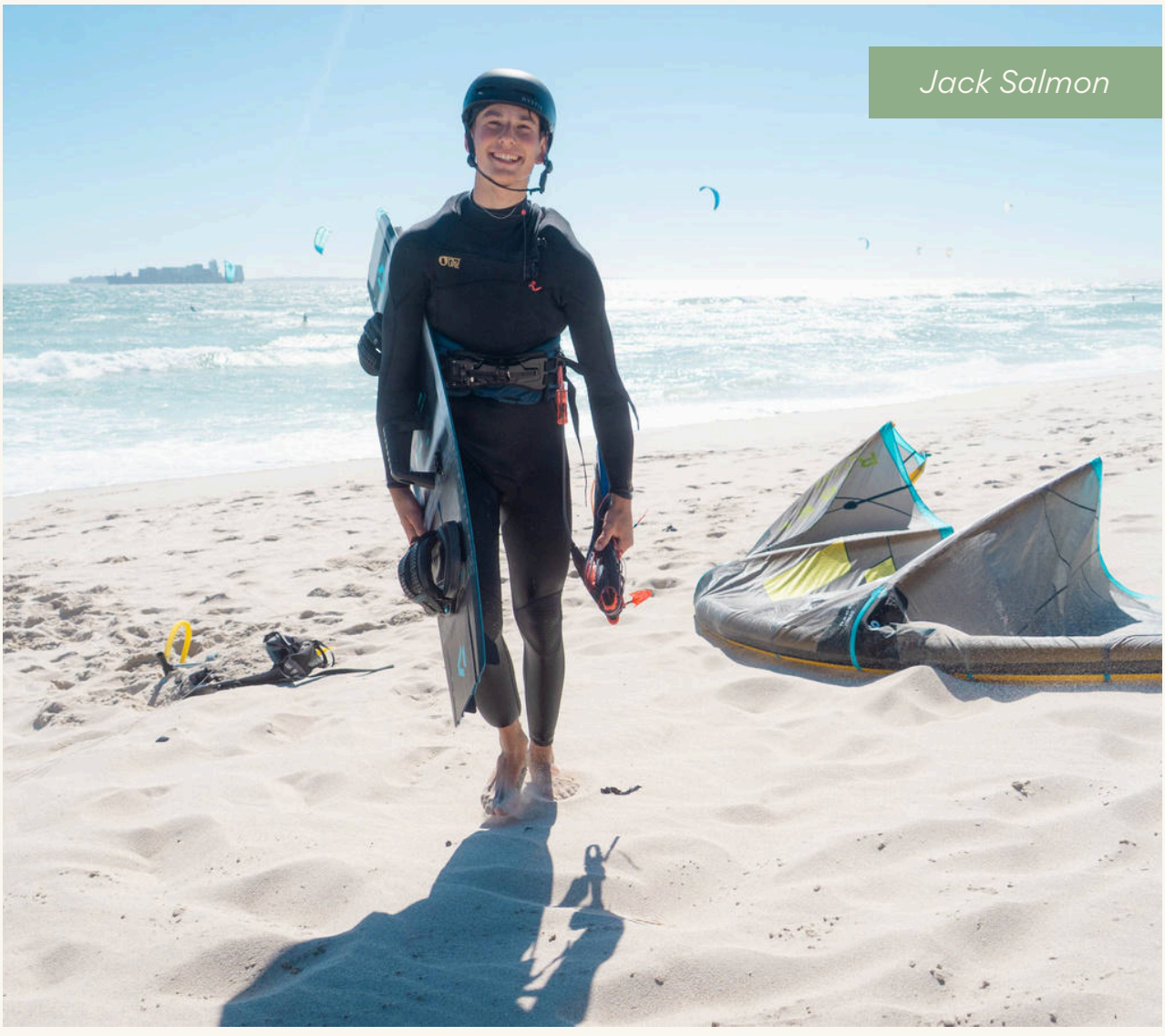
Gianna Ossello



Benny Convery



Emma Lee



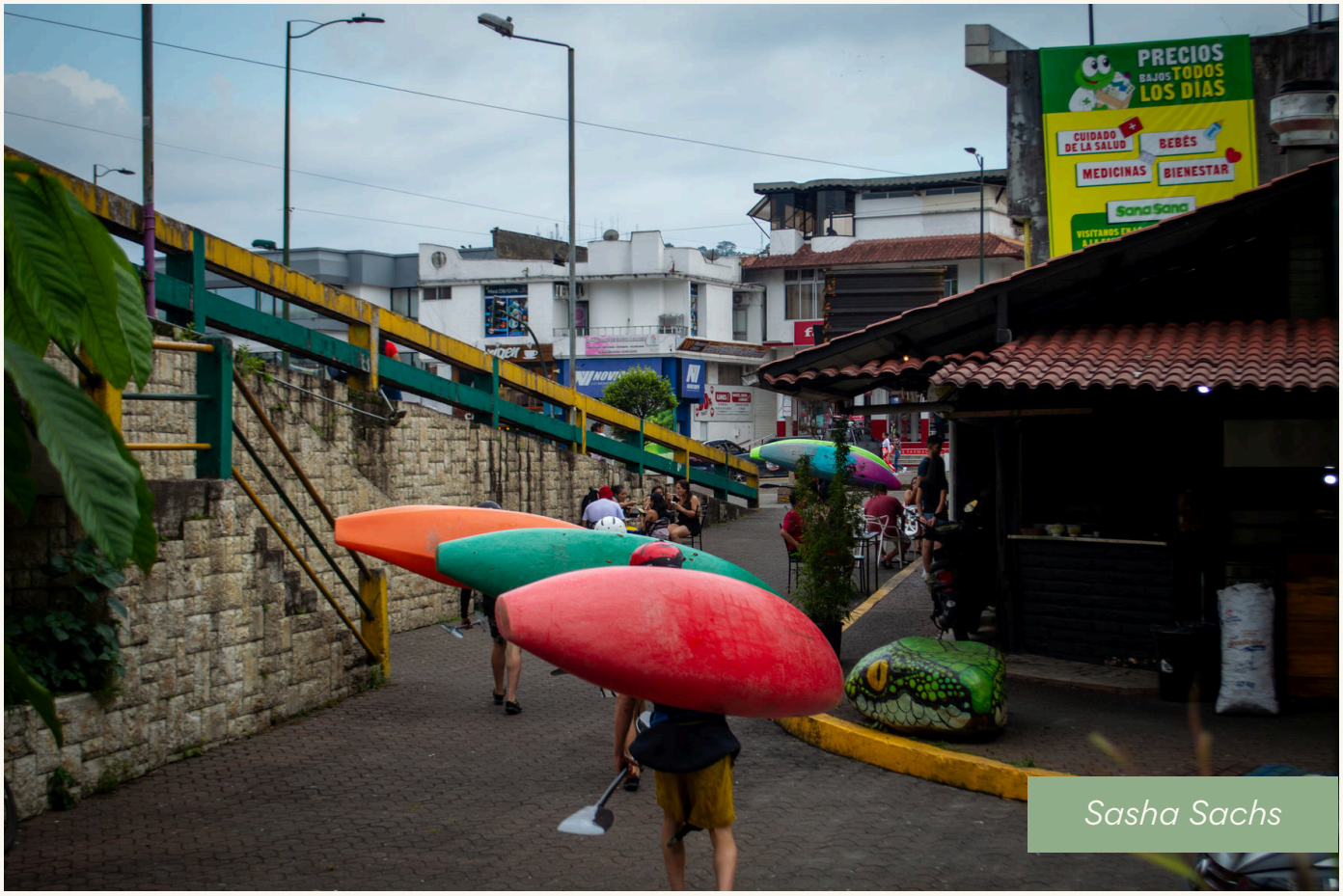
Jack Salmon



Jack Salmon



Emmerson Sparks


PRECIOS
BAJOS TODOS
LOS DÍAS
CUIDADO DE LA SALUD
BEBÉS
MEDICINAS
BIENESTAR
Sana Sana

Sasha Sachs





Jack Salmon



Emmerson Sparks


Max Barron

Consistency, Curiosity and Confidence

For many climbers, success is initially measured in grades, competitions, or the number of routes ticked off in a season. But for WCA climbing coach Lohan Lizin, the real measure of success is something deeper: longevity, growth, and a lifelong connection to the sport. His own journey, marked by years of dedication, shapes the way he now guides the next generation of climbers at WCA.

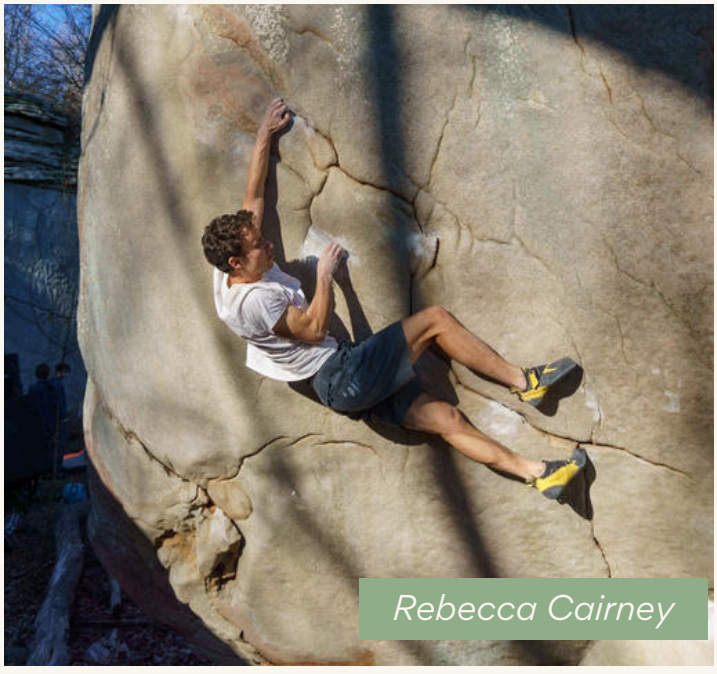
This past winter was a season of personal breakthroughs for Lohan who sent some of his longest standing projects after years (sometimes decades) of work. After five years, he finally stood atop Tears of Unfathomable Sadness, a 14b project that had challenged him for half a decade. In the same season, he also completed The Shield (V12) and The Law (V11), two boulders he first walked by on his very first day climbing outside. “It was pretty surreal to finally stand on top of them 11 years later,” he reflects. That kind of long term commitment to a single route, to a process, to a goal, defines his approach to coaching. At WCA, he emphasizes the importance of progression over quick results. “No matter where we are or what discipline we’re focused on, my priority is helping students build a sustainable relationship with climbing. That means avoiding injury, developing good tactics, fostering a positive mindset, and learning how to adapt.”

HEAD COACH LOHAN LIZIN


Rebecca Cairney

Rather than pushing students to chase numbers, he encourages them to explore and expand what feels comfortable. “If I can nudge them to stretch the edges of their comfort zone, their love for climbing won’t just last - it will deepen. That growth compounds over time, and suddenly, what once felt intimidating becomes second nature.”

Raised by two teachers, Lohan didn’t always imagine himself stepping into an educator role. As a kid, he cycled through passions - soccer, running - each one pursued with intense focus. By high school, Lohan was taking school seriously and loved all things endurance. “My heroes in the running world were also climbers,” he remembers. “I wanted to be like them.” It was his senior year, his first job, and his first car that created the perfect storm for discovery. “I suddenly had income and freedom, and I found climbing. I was at the crag every moment I could be.” The obsession quickly shifted his priorities. He chose Young Harris College for its Outdoor Education program, thinking it would help him explore his interests. But soon, climbing took over his college life, and he eventually transitioned out of Outdoor Education


Rebecca Cairney

There’s this binary in climbing I’ve noticed: either you’re serious and all about performance, or you’re just out there for fun. I think those things can, and should coexist. One of the cultures I’m trying to build at WCA is that progression can be fun. You can care deeply about getting better and still love the process

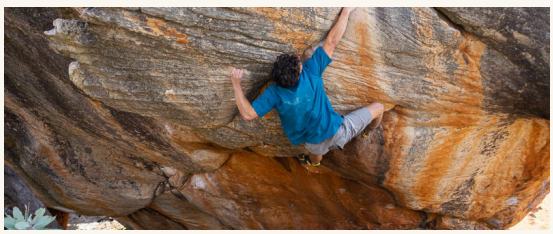
and into math and did his best to focus his academic life around climbing. “I only spent two weekends on campus in four years. I wanted to get as much out of climbing as I could.”

After graduation, he assumed school was just another box to check. He flew to Europe and landed a job in Norway, climbing abroad for the first time. “Talking about climbing in different languages, climbing with my heroes - it opened my eyes to what was possible when I wasn’t just a weekend warrior.” But life had other plans. He got injured in Spain, returned to the US, and earned a rope access certification. For the next three years, that became the pattern: work contracts for three to four months, then travel and climb for the rest of the year.

It was in Las Vegas, spring of 2021, that he met a former Head Coach WCA. They were both projecting the same route. After Lohan returned to his job, something felt off. “I’d spent years chasing my own goals, but it started to feel self-indulgent. I wanted something that felt more meaningful.” When he heard there might be a spot on the WCA team he reached out. That fall, he joined the Climbing Academy. “I was nervous stepping into the role but I knew I could be a positive presence, and I was curious, curious about coaching, about impact, about what it could mean to help others fall in love with the process the way I had.”

Lohan's own climbing has evolved alongside his mindset. Once a typical endurance focused climber with strong fingers and a linear approach, injury forced him to rewire. "I had to strengthen other parts of my body. Now I feel more well-rounded than ever. I thrive on routes that are complex, steep, and continuous - with nowhere to hide and lots to puzzle together."

A big part of that is mindset. "There's this binary in climbing I've noticed: either you're serious and all about performance, or you're just out there for fun. I think those things can, and should coexist. One of the cultures I'm trying to build at WCA is that progression can be fun. You can care deeply about getting better and still love the process." He encourages students to set their own goals, tracking progress in more nuanced ways than just grades. "Grades are just one piece. I look at their base - the volume of climbing, their skills with on-sighting, how they're flashing routes. We track aches, tweaks, style preferences. We have coach meetings, student journals. But most of all, we give students autonomy. Their goals have to belong to them, not us."





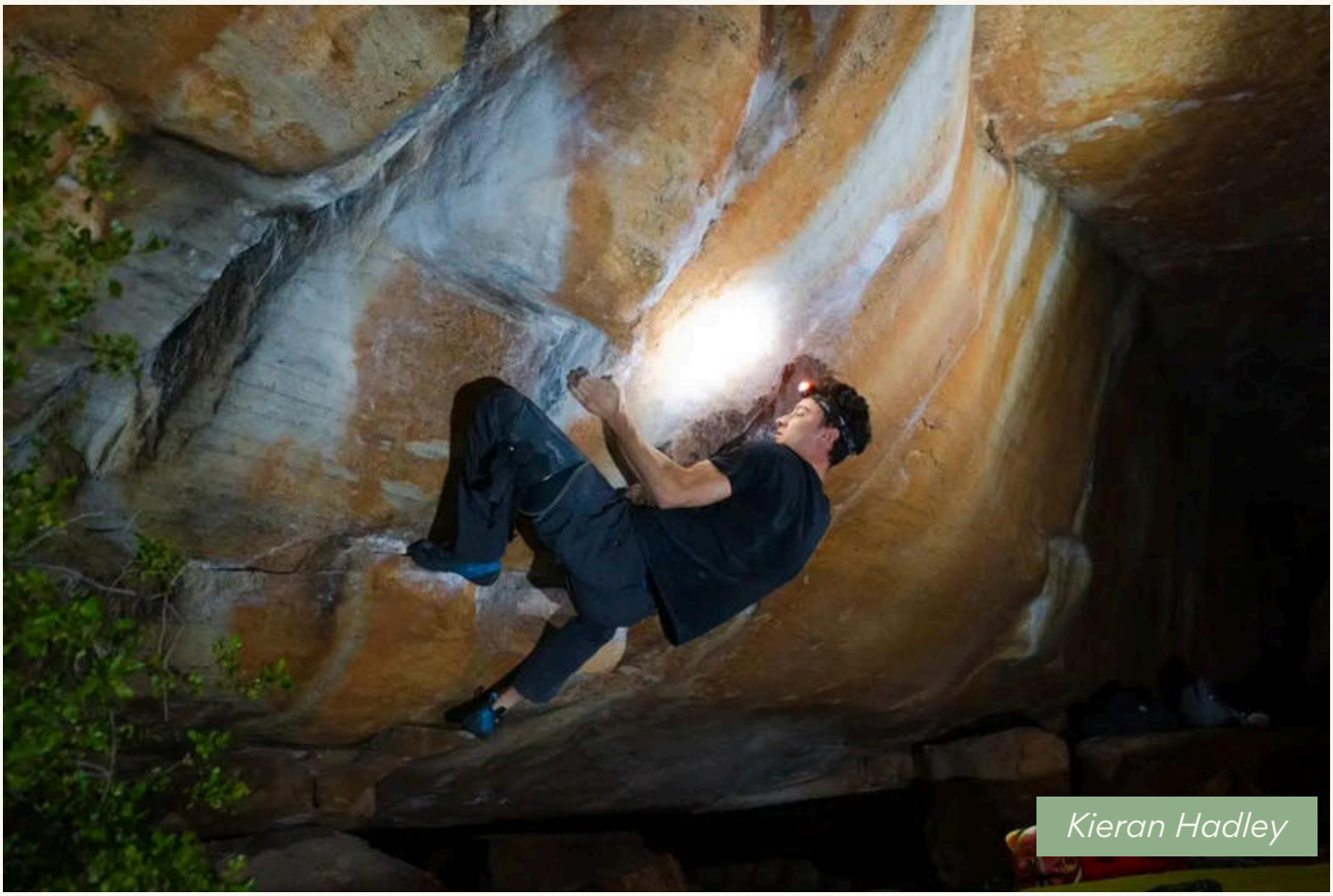
Kieran Hadley

Global climbing experiences have also shaped Lohan's coaching. From Yosemite to Norway to Spain, he's learned that the strongest climbers aren't necessarily the most talented - they're the ones who are consistent, curious, and confident. "Traveling showed me that being adaptable is a superpower. Some of the best climbers in the world don't just power through, they figure things out." That lesson has stayed with him, especially when it comes to projecting. "If you're almost doing it on your first try, you don't really know what you're capable of. The magic of trying something for 10 days is what it teaches you, not just about climbing, but about yourself."

TRAVELING SHOWED ME THAT BEING ADAPTABLE IS A SUPERPOWER. SOME OF THE BEST CLIMBERS IN THE WORLD DON'T JUST POWER THROUGH, THEY FIGURE THINGS OUT ... IF YOU'RE ALMOST DOING IT ON YOUR FIRST TRY, YOU DON'T REALLY KNOW WHAT YOU'RE CAPABLE OF. THE MAGIC OF TRYING SOMETHING FOR 10 DAYS IS WHAT IT TEACHES YOU, NOT JUST ABOUT CLIMBING, BUT ABOUT YOURSELF."

At WCA, Lohan gets to experience those kinds of moments over and over, through his students. "When you first start climbing, everything is new. There's so much discovery. Coaching lets me feel that again, through them." His hope is that students walk away not just stronger or more skilled, but more confident and empowered. "A lot of our students come in with someone else's vision of what their climbing should be. I want them to take ownership, to shape their journey in a way that feels authentic to them." And if there's one piece of advice he hopes they carry forward, it's this: "Climb without media sometimes. Don't just watch beta videos to send quickly - do it for inspiration. There's a kind of creativity and intuition that only comes from figuring it out for yourself."

At WCA, Lohan's goal isn't just to help students climb harder. It's to help them fall in love with the sport in a way that lasts a lifetime. Whether they're facing a highball boulder, an unfamiliar discipline, or a mental block, his coaching instills the tools to trust the process, embrace the unknown, and keep showing up - for the climb, and for themselves.



Head Coach Climb| Lohan Lizin

THE COLLEGE ESSAY

JACQUELINE KIMMEL (KAYAK '25)

I was fourteen years old, thousands of miles away from my parents, and embarking on the challenge of kayaking down the biggest whitewater I had ever seen, the rapids of the Zambezi River. I looked up at a crashing wave towering over me. I took a final gasp of air before being submerged underwater.

My apprehension consumed me and I swam out of my kayak. Now, I was in the hands of the river.

It could suck me into the undercurrent, leading me to drown, or it could bring me to the surface, relieving the tightness in my lungs. I tumbled down the river as my boat, which felt miles away, did the same. As the river began to calm, I spotted shore and urgently swam to it. After scrambling up the bank, I saw the rapid I failed to paddle. Furious, I looked away, hoping to escape the embarrassment from the public display of my failure. Instead, I was reminded that I had ten more kilometers to paddle and a climb of 850 stairs out of the canyon. I felt the judgmental stares of my peers while tears streamed down my face as my thoughts decimated my confidence, passion, and strength.



Sasha Sachs

Each day, this scene repeated itself, reaffirming my thoughts that said I'm weak, I'm incapable, I'm a burden. I failed to appreciate the incredible opportunity before me due to my personal feelings of inadequacy. I was a sophomore in high school and able to travel the world to see crocodiles, monkeys, elephants, and giraffes, all while paddling one of the most iconic rivers. Nevertheless, every day I was swept down the river without my kayak, leaving me with feelings of suffering and despair. Swimming every day brought out all my failures, making me believe that I had no potential in life. I neglected my body and mind under the misconception that I was unlovable and undeserving. When I looked in the mirror, my silhouette turned into hues of gray.

For months after Zambia, my color remained pale, during darkest moments I would look towards my friends as crutches of support. After listening to my repetitive rant about how depression relentlessly sucked my passion away, my friend and Dungeons and Dragons partner, Wilson, proposed the question, "What if tomorrow is better?" At that moment, I was forced to recognize the potential of hope. I had to believe in myself to fight the dragon of depression. From then on, I picked up my sword, my hope for a better future and my love for the river, and went into battle.

I regained my strength behind my shield, my friendships and my sisterhood, instead of letting the beast burn my skin and claw at my heart. **I returned to kayaking with a focus of enjoying my time on the water while working towards my goals. I took steps towards recovery by prioritizing myself and my health, and after a year, my vibrancy and color returned.**

Two years since my first swim on the Zambezi River, I have returned with a reborn sense of confidence, passion, and strength. I no longer fear the rapids, but rather embrace them, knowing they act as a reflection of my resilience to overcome adversity. I feel empowered to push myself in ways my fourteen-year-old self couldn't imagine. Looking back, I am grateful for my battle because it has supplied me with resilience, determination, and hope. My struggle taught me two lessons, first, in order to persevere one must have hope that a positive outcome is possible. Second, resilience is the ability to adaptively respond to the same task to achieve a better outcome without succumbing to despair.

Jackie is from Cabin John, Maryland. She plans to attend the University of Washington in the Fall and study Engineering



Written by Jack Salmon for The Mission Magazine.
Photos by Jack Salmon

KITE ACADEMY FUNDRAISING

The goal was lofty – a height that strained the imagination to think about, a height above the flight path of most airplanes. Our sights were set on the stratosphere – around 30,000 feet or 10,000 meters – intangible and far-fetched, but also somehow within the limits for a team of next generation kiters with buckets of determination.

The students of the World Class Kiteboard Academy (WCKA) made up five groups, each with one WOO sports device that would be swapped around at equal intervals in relay format throughout the 90-minute time period. All teams would work together to reach for the skies in the bay of Paracas in Peru when the windiest day of the holding period arrived.

The challenge was in aid of our school's scholarship fund as well as a fundraiser for an organization we support in Cape Town called 9Miles Project. The scholarship fund gives financial aid to students who otherwise would not be able to attend WCKA. As a service learning project next term, our students will visit the 9Miles Project which uses surfing as a form of empowerment for children from at-risk communities in Cape Town.

In the days before the challenge, an infectious optimism spread among the student body, manifesting in various amusing methods of preparation. Tommy was confidently focused, having nailed the famous 'woosting' maneuver in sessions beforehand to reach the extra inches of vertical height with his board above his head. Will, as usual, was frothing and was ready to send it at any moment. All the while, Elias was quietly contemplating whether the 13 or 9m would woost his team to the greatest heights.

In classes, distracted conversations revolved around the technique for cumulative height. In precalculus, students paused between identifying polynomial functions to ponder the dilemma that everyone would end up further and further downwind if they jumped as high and frequently as possible. Meanwhile in Environmental Sciences, research on the Marine Protected Area implementation off the coast of Peru grinded to a halt, as students debated whether it was better to use a big kite, woost to the moon, then endure a costly upwind slog, or reach greater heights on a smaller kite with a lower but more vertical boost? It was all to play for and there was only one way to find out.

The windiest day of the waiting period arrived and Head Coach Merle Mönster gave the green light for the event that afternoon. Students kept an eye out for white horses in the morning's lessons and thoughts drifted to the challenge. 30,000 feet began to seem stratospheric.

All of a sudden, at the shriek of the whistle they were off. Though all teams were working together towards the goal, a competitive edge drove many towards peak performance. Most riders had scrapped the earlier pretense of calculations and instead adopted a 'go big or go home' strategy. Arguably, the most tried and tested technique in a high pressure situation such as this by kiters around the world, it seemed the tool for the job.

I had never thought of the woost as a nuanced maneuver, but there was an exciting array of techniques on display. Some wildly swinging woosts, some slow and stylish woosts, and some careful and calculated woosts to name a few. All riders had one thing in common: jump frequency was at a max and no-one was holding back.



Kite Academy Fundraising



And what a scene this made for the beach crew. Cheering on teammates was a crucial task and a scientifically proven method to increase performance. Once gear was ready and all was set for those next in the relay, riders' woosting techniques were compared to decipher the optimum method. Was it the speed of the swing, or overall invertedness that achieved the biggest boosts? The answers were usually lost in the excited encouragement dealt out to perk up their spent teammates who closed in on the beach ready for another run. As the 90 minutes ticked by, the woosts got wilder and the cumulative height picked up pace. For those retiring from their sessions, muscles rarely used in day-to-day riding screamed, and everyone reached the end of the session with nothing left in the tank.

Achieving the goal was never something that would determine the success of the event, intended as a team building challenge to raise funds for others. But, there was a certain air of responsibility among the group to soar to the heights of the target. Alas, given the wind conditions of the day and the small number of WOOs available, the stratosphere was missed this time, only to land on the still mightily impressive height around that of the Matterhorn. So there we left it, proud that we had undoubtedly achieved our best, but looking forward to what was in store for the next challenge, ready to top our performance and prepared to shoot for the stars.

45% of the WCA student body receive financial aid to attend our school. The funds raised by events like these help to make the WCA experience possible for our students. We are deeply grateful to the students, faculty, and donors for your support.

Ayukii- (Hello), Nanithvuy uum (my name is) Ruby Williams. I am a Quartz Valley Tribal Member and a Karuk person from Happy Camp, California. I first started kayaking 3 years ago in the first cohort trip with Paddle Tribal Waters in pursuit of doing the first of the Klamath River, where I learned the very basic skills of white water kayaking. Since then, I have attended two semesters at Paddle Tribal Waters Academy (PTWA) and one semester at World Class Kayak Academy.

RUBY WILLAMS
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



Keeya Wiki

Meet Ruby Williams, a senior at Paddle Tribal Waters Academy. On the water and in the classroom Ruby is a true leader. She faces life with energy and determination and encourages her classmates to be the best they can be.

Ruby is no stranger to challenges. Her accelerated kayaking progression at PTWA and WCKA is motivated by the first descent of the undammed Klamath River, and Ruby has worked hard to become a strong enough paddler for the first descent by kayaking other rivers like the Ottawa and Zambezi. She has spent her final three semesters of high school travelling to four countries in three continents, leaving behind her family and home in the name of preparing for a significant expedition.

Last Fall, Ruby was a class III paddler with one semester of Paddle Tribal Waters Academy under her belt. She and fellow PTWA classmate, Jayden Dauz, travelled to Ottawa, Ontario and Livingston, Zambia for a Fall Semester with WCKA. “I got to Canada, and I was quaking in my boots,” Ruby reflects. “I had never seen any kind of big water in my life, but I actually crushed it. And everyone was like, ‘you're so much better than you make yourself out to be.’” Ruby quickly advanced from a novice bigwater paddler to running the Zambezi River. Ruby’s challenge these days is to find balance between the mental and physical aspects of kayaking. Like many kayakers, Ruby constantly works to find the balance between fear and ability. “One thing I’m working on now,” Ruby shares, “is honing my skills on class three so then I can confidently run class four and five.”

Ruby’s connection to the river goes far beyond kayaking, however, and dates back to long before she ever stretched a spray skirt onto a kayak. “River Steward, in my eyes, is kind of a westernized term that I don't really use.” Ruby reflects, “I don't think Native people as a whole use it, because that's just something that we've been doing since time immemorial.”


Keeya Wiki


Keeya Wiki

Ruby on the Palguin River in Pucón, Chile

Ruby is a kayaker and an advocate for free flowing rivers, but those titles only scratch the surface of defining Ruby's connection to the river: "my relationship with the river is more than it's just a river. It's a part of my bloodline. It's my family. It's who I am as a Karuk person. And so what it means to me is more than just that label. It's being out gathering. It's having this coexisting relationship of just being a Native person doing anything, honestly. The river is always in the back of my mind."

At Paddle Tribal Waters Academy, Ruby helps to instill stoke for kayaking and respect for the river in her fellow classmates, including her younger brother, Thad. Ruby's advice to younger students attending WCA is to "involve themselves in as many activities and social hangouts as possible." Ruby reflects on the student body: "WCA is full of super incredible kids that are very similar to me. We're all from all different places, but we have very similar outlooks on kayaking and life, honestly." Aside from the community and kayaking progression, Ruby was motivated to attend PTWA and WCA for the educational opportunities. Ruby will attend Fort Lewis College next year and plans to study Environmental Science. "I thought the best way to be properly prepared for college would be leaving home for a while and attending World Class Academy." Ruby shares, "Now, in my last three weeks of high school, I can truly say that I have learned more here than I have ever thought possible."

Ruby and her younger brother, Thad, in the McKenzie River Basin

Bella Machado





STUDENT SPOTLIGHT
MATTSON CLEMENT

Meet Mattson Clement, an 18 year old mountain biker from Acton, Massachusetts, currently in his final year with World Class Academy's Mountain Bike program. For Mattson, the journey to enduro biking didn't begin on elite trails - it started with '90s scrap bikes, neighbourhood adventures, and a good friend who shared his love of two wheels. "We'd bomb around the neighborhood on whatever bikes we could find." That curiosity evolved into trail riding, and eventually, in 2019, a spot on his local XC team, the Gnargognauts, set things in motion. "That summer, I went to Highland Mountain Bike Park, and something clicked. My coach Greg Jackson helped me realize that Enduro could give me the perfect mix, the structure of XC and the freedom of flying through rock gardens."

Mattson's decision to join World Class Academy was deeply influenced by two close friends who went through the program. "When Max came back, he gave me a glimpse into what it's like to live away from home and chase riding at the highest level," Mattson shares. "Then when Tucker joined the following year, it sealed the deal. I had to do it." The blend of academic learning, global travel, and access to elite level trails made WCA the perfect fit.

From Whistler to Chile, New Zealand to Scotland, Mattson has chased trails across the globe. “World Class has really shown me the meaning of community. Being in such a tight knit group, you start to realize how much your actions matter, not just for you, but for the people around you.” That sense of connection has helped him grow both as a rider and a person. “If I can help someone else have a better day - even in a small way - I’m doing something right.”



Mattson brings a quiet leadership to the group, rooted in lived experience. “I like to think I encourage people to ride more,” he says. “My old coach Greg Jackson used to say, ‘Just ride your bike,’ and that stuck with me.” Through injury and recovery, he’s remained a steady source of optimism. “Everyone has hard days. I’ve had my share of them, on and off the bike, but I try not to let it bring the group down. And when I’m feeling low, the group helps bring me up. That’s the balance.” Injuries have been a defining part of Mattson’s story. He tore his ACL in 2020, a setback that spiraled into a series of season-ending injuries. “Right now, I’m healing from the most impactful injury I’ve ever had. It’s not where I wanted to be for the start of 2025, but I’m finding ways to stay grounded - focusing on school, healthy-ish eating, and even diving into other interests like DJing.” Through it all, he’s developed a powerful resilience. “You don’t really get through this kind of thing without becoming more open minded. It forces you to grow.”

Despite the setbacks, 2024 was one of Mattson’s best riding years to date. He placed 6th at both the U.S. and Canadian Enduro Nationals and pulled off his first backflips while riding in Chile. “That moment, trying flips with Hudson, was huge. We were just fully supporting each other - it was one of those times where the bond off the bike made the moment on the bike even more meaningful.”

MEET THE HEADS OF SCHOOL







Riley Gardner MTB/Surf Academy

Riley has been working at World Class since 2017. He jumped into the Program Director role of the Kayak Academy in his first year, and left the kayakers in 2020 to start the Mountain Bike Pilot Program where he was the sole teacher, coach, and mentor to three Peruvian Students. After a brief return to the kayak team during COVID, Riley restarted the Mountain Bike Academy in full force in 2021 and has been the Head of School since 2022. Next year he will become the Head of School for the inaugural year of the World Class Surf Academy (tell your surf friends!)

Riley grew up in Redlands, California, majored in History at Gonzaga University, and he now calls Alpine, Wyoming home. Riley's favorite local WY activity is river surfing on the Snake River Canyon's standing wave, Lunch Counter. As someone who bases his life around his athletic desires, Riley believes wroking WCA is the perfect fit for him: "love education, I love traveling, I love logistics, and I love love love sports!"

Reflecting on his journey so far at World Class, Riley shares, "I love how much WCA has brought me to places I would have never been to otherwise. I probably would have always ended up in Queenstown at some point. But I probably would have never gone to Missatibi, Quebec, or Santa Coloma de Farners, Spain, to name just two places."





Polly Crathorne Kite Academy

Polly, a champion kite boarder from the UK, joined the Kite Academy faculty in 2018. Polly filled the role of Head Coach from 2019-2022 in addition to teaching ten different classes in her four years at WCA before becoming the Kite Head of School in 2022.

Polly would have fit in well at WCKA as a student. At the age of 16, Polly and her sister were the first females to kitesurf across the English Channel. Polly won gold at the British Freestyle Championship in 2012 and 2023 and came in first place in Tajikistan in 2017 at the record-breaking, highest altitude regatta in the world on Lake Karakul, 13000 ft above sea level.

Polly earned a Masters of the Arts in Human Geography from the University of Edinburgh with first class honors before coming to WCA, a job which she is drawn to because of the "passionate team of wonderful, interesting people who are all committed to nurturing the next generation of kiters."

Polly also enjoys channeling her kiting prowess into expedition style endeavors. Most recently she and her sister participated in the Varanger Arctic Kite Enduro - a multi-day snowkiting race over the Varanger Peninsula in Finmark, Norway.

Kalob Grady Kayak Academy

Kalob began his journey with World Class Kayak Academy as a student. He attended a single term his senior year that changed the course of his life: “from that moment forward, I have believed in the power of this program to positively impact the directory of young adults at this important stage in their life. Being an educator, mentor, coach, etc, and having first-row seats to the personal growth of our students is an extremely rewarding feeling.”

Kalob began working for the Kayak Academy as Head Coach in 2017 and transitioned to the Program Director role in 2020 before becoming Head of School in 2022.

Kalob was born and raised on the banks of the Ottawa River in Ontario, Canada. He still calls the Ottawa Valley home and the river’s big water waves are the reason for Kalob’s expertise in big-wave freestyle kayaking.

Kalob is a very accomplished kayaker in his own right. He is the current Canadian National Champion in Freestyle in addition to being the National Team Head Coach.

Kalob’s recent notable expeditions include Northwest Madagascar (2025), the Ivindo River, Gabon (2024) and Hawaii (2019)

Kalob is currently pursuing a second career as a pilot and working on a BA in Aviation and Geography at the University of Waterloo, Ontario







Drew Lefkowith Climb Academy



Drew joined the Climbing Academy in 2021 as the Program Director in addition to teaching World Literature and AP Human Geography. She was drawn the program, however, by the mentorship aspects of WCA: “many of the mentors I had in my early years climbing really inspired me. TCA was an opportunity to take on a mentorship role in the climbing community in a powerful way, shaping the next generation of climbers.”



Before climbing, Drew’s first love was music. She grew up playing Jazz Saxophone and earned a Bachelor’s in Music and Music Education at Indiana University before becoming the band director at a middle school in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Drawn to education and travel, Drew moved to China to work in a culturally immersive English program and climb outside around the world. Continuing to develop as an educator, Drew recently completed her Masters in Outdoor Leadership from Prescott University in Arizona



Since becoming Head of School in 2022, Drew had been based back in the climbing mecca of the Daniel Boone National Forest where she is currently building a house in the Red River Gorge. In the meantime, Drew lives in her van which gives her plenty of leeway to travel the country to crags in Utah and Colorado.

Reflecting on her role at WCA, Drew wraps up, “Travel and what we learn about ourselves through it is such a powerful learning opportunity. Being able to facilitate that for others gives me a lot of joy”

SENIOR CAPSTONE: KITE ACADEMY

Seniors in Comparative Literature across all academies spend quarter four questioning, researching, and writing a capstone essay. The assignment is simple: reflect on something you care about, ask a meaningful question, and set out to answer your question through rigorous research and academic writing. Cole Buller asked his students to reflect on their three biggest passions and explore on the nature of their interest to start the process.



POLA LODZIŃSKA

As I reflect on my personal and educational experiences, there are three themes that become clearly the closest to me. If I were to summarize my 17 years , most of my time has been spent outside of home. From a very young age, my parents instilled in me a strong passion for traveling and various extreme sports. They also showed me how important and interesting education is. Three clear topics come to my mind right away.

Traveling. I can't imagine life without it. Discovering other cultures, meeting new people, and learning about their views on the world is like discovering something completely new. I have already had the chance to visit many countries, and it's easy to notice that each one is completely different. We all live on the same planet, yet the contrast between some continents is like day and night. Traveling has taught me a lot. To appreciate the small things in life and understand the diversity that exists around the world. It has opened my mind and helped me grow as a person, more open and adaptable to new experiences.

Sports- I know that practicing sports from a young age is one of the most valuable experiences in my life. It taught me discipline, teamwork, and perseverance. From an early age, I was encouraged to try various sports, and through them,I learned how to push my limits and work towards goals. Each sport I tried brought something unique to my life. It helped me build resilience and confidence, which still helps me today. They've not only kept me active but also helped me connect with other people with the same passion and make lasting friendships.

In the next few years, I really want to combine the things I love, which is traveling, doing sports, with something very important to me: education. Right now, this is a very personal topic for me and something I'm really interested in. Many students face a big dilemma before choosing their studies, whether to stay in their hometown or try studying in a different part of the world. Studying abroad is definitely a very valuable experience that can teach us a lot.

As these three things are the closest to me, I want to focus on practicing sports at a young age. I know that what sport teaches us at a young age stays with us forever, and we often don't even realize how much it accompanies us throughout life. A possible question is: How does practicing sports at a young age reflect in the future?

WORLD CLASS SURF ACADEMY

By Riley Gardner
Head of School,
Surf Academy

Growth has been an integral aspect of World Class Academy since its inception. Our students grow throughout the year - as students, as athletes, and even physically. Our staff grows their teaching methodology; our admin grows the curriculum. The MTB Academy grew from 6 students in the fall of 2021 to 23 students in the fall of 2024. In 2001, World Class Academy was founded as World Class Kayak Academy. The school existed in one form: as a traveling high school for whitewater kayakers. In a search for a more sustainable model, the school grew laterally into other sports. The Kiteboard Academy was the second sport added in 2013, and then came the Climbing Academy in 2016, and then the MTB Academy was added in 2020.

We have quickly seen that the World Class Academy model was not fundamentally tied to whitewater kayaking, but that the core elements of the experience were rooted in students and faculty with a shared passion for their particular sport, combined with a formal education and international travel. WCA can grow into other sports, but still retain its core at the heart of what we do. It is hard for any WCA admin to look at a sport and not wonder, “could the WCA model work here?”

I started working for World Class Academy in 2017. I spent my first fall break surfing in Southern California while visiting my family before flying to Africa for Q2. This proved to be a trend that would continue throughout my time working in the field at WCA- I usually spent my breaks surfing somewhere.



It occurred to me: a World Class Academy Surf program could work. I started running the numbers and checking the boxes. There is no shortage of places to travel to, a robust sports culture, and a huge base of potential students and staff... The writing was on the wall, WCA Surf could not just work, it could thrive!

The first step was figuring out which destinations the school should travel to. Costa Rica was an obvious place to start the school year. Costa Rica feels like the school's backyard in so many ways. Our principal, Capo Rettig, lives there, two of the academies have spent multiple quarters there. Quality surf breaks, warm water, interesting towns, and a bit of road tripping should create a fantastic start for our newest academy.

Looking at the second quarter, I was drawn to Portugal. The sheer number of waves, the consistency of swell, and the vibrant surf culture make this an outstanding destination.

Quarter three brings the school back into warmer waters - and a new country for any World Class Academy - Indonesia. It is one of the most classic international places to travel for surfing, and we are excited to get our feet wet there during the inaugural year of WCA Surf.

WCA Surf is going to end the school year in Peru. Three academies have spent quarters in Peru (kayak, kite, and MTB) but Peru is probably more famous for surfing. The country has a huge coastline and some of the longest waves in the world.

At its core, World Class Academy will always be an alternative education model for students who are passionate about a sport. Each school operates on the same founding principles, but the different sports and locations cause each school to develop its own flair. WCA Surf will certainly follow this trajectory, and we are excited to see this program grow into its personality.

Surf Academy









STUDENT SPOTLIGHT
ADDY KREIDEL

Meet Adelaide Kreidel, also known as Addy, a senior at World Class Academy, wrapping up her third and final year with the Climbing Academy and graduating in Italy this spring. Born in St. Louis and raised in Tucson, Arizona, Addy proudly calls the desert home. “That’s what I think of when I think of home - the desert, the cacti,” she says. Addy was practically born into climbing. Her dad, a lifelong climber, had her and her brother on the wall before they could talk. Weekends were spent at Mt. Lemmon, scaling routes as a family. After moving to Texas, she shifted to indoor competition climbing. Her dad heard about World Class through a friend, and Addy applied. “It felt too good to be true,” she says. What started as one semester turned into a three year journey.

Addy remembers being shy when she first joined WCA as a sophomore. “I was introverted. I hadn’t really come out of my shell yet,” she says. But over the years, something shifted. Whether it was the close knit environment, the daily routines mixed with new countries and cultures, or the countless opportunities to meet new people, Addy began to open up. “I’ve found myself more - free and open in the world. I think that’s a beautiful thing.” Coaching summer camps back home “Working with younger kids reminded me how easy it is to be yourself. They’re just so open and unfiltered, it was really inspiring.” It helped her realize she was capable of connecting, leading, and being confident herself.

These days, Addy is known among her peers as someone who listens, advocates, and quietly makes things better for others, often behind the scenes. “I like encouraging people to speak their minds. Even if it’s uncomfortable, I’m someone who will stand up and speak out.”

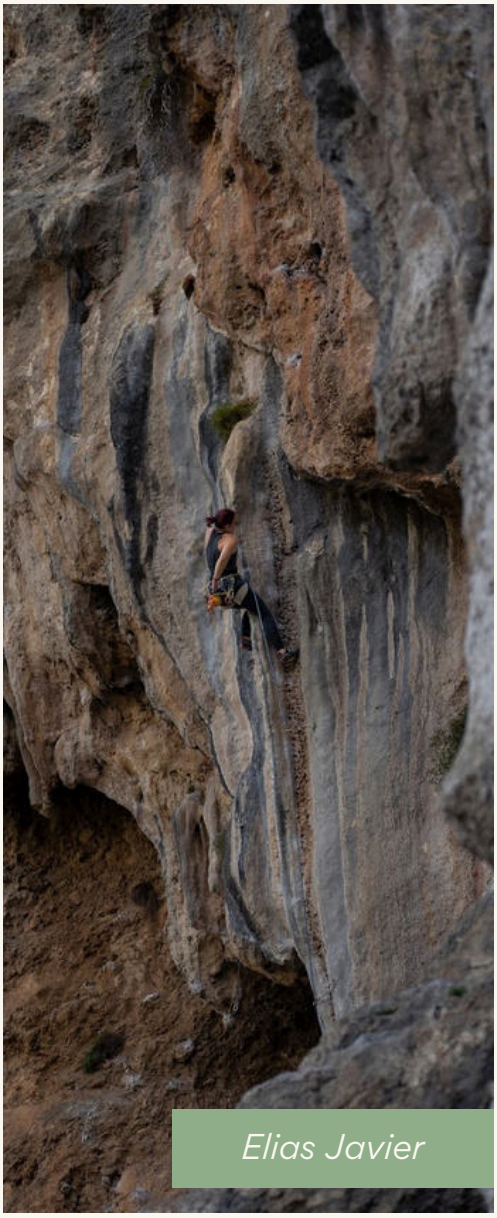
Addy has also faced her fair share of challenges. Academically, adjusting to WCA’s unique setup working alongside mentors who are also your climbing coaches and teachers, wasn’t easy at first. And physically, she’s dealt with recurring ankle injuries that made long days on the wall tough. “There were moments when I had to step back from climbing, but it made me appreciate all the other parts of this program - the places we go, the people I get to be with.”

Despite the setbacks, Addy’s grown immensely as a climber. “I wasn’t the most confident when I first came here. I was worried about what people would think of me. But the community shut that down immediately. Everyone’s just so supportive.” Her proudest moment? Sending her first 5.13 in Greece, a powerful, bouldery limestone route with tufas and an upside down kneebar. “It was called K3 - if you’re ever in Leonidio, climb it. It’s incredible.” That climb lit a fire in her. “After that, I realized I wanted to build a base. More 5.12s. Fill in the pyramid. But I also want to enjoy my senior year, take in the travel, the people, the whole experience.”

And it’s been quite the journey. Over her three years, Addy’s traveled to nine countries with WCA: France, Spain, Slovenia, South Africa, Turkey, Australia, and more. “I love seeing how different cultures interact, learning bits of the language, even just enough to order coffee or ask about bread. Not to blend in, but to really immerse myself.”



Marc Fulton



Elias Javier

PROGRAM DIRECTOR HANNAH TAY

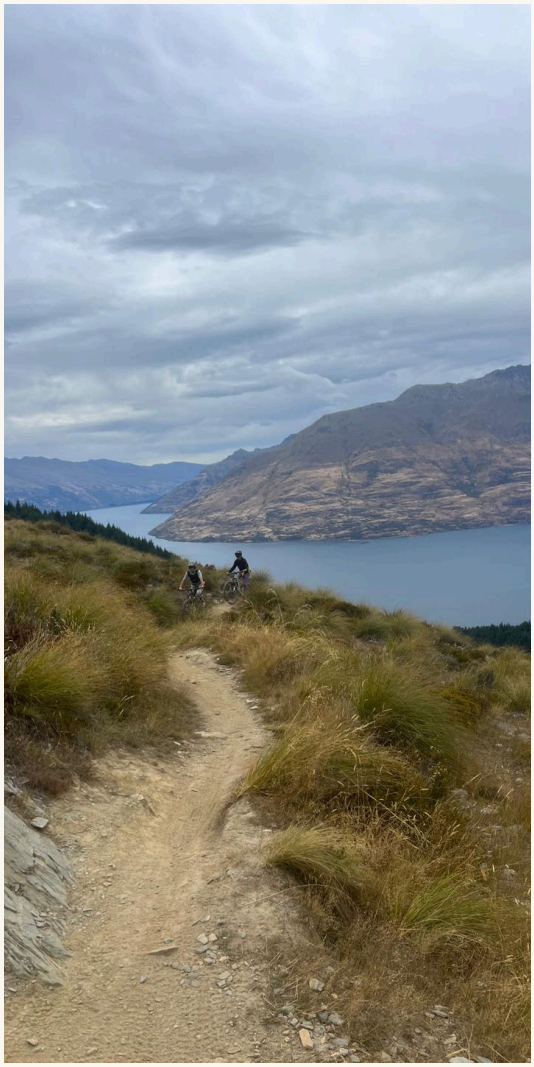
Hannah Tay's role as Program Director of WCA's Mountain Bike Academy isn't just about biking - it's about helping her students grow into capable, curious, and independent people. While the students come into the program as skilled riders, Hannah brings something just as essential to the table: mentorship, a sharp eye for leadership, and a deeply personal understanding of outdoor adventure, academic exploration, and what it means to find your way off the beaten path.

Hannah's journey to WCA didn't follow a traditional route. She grew up in New York and in her formative years her parents instilled in her a love of creativity and exploration. These early experiences sparked a lifelong habit of movement - across disciplines, continents, and personal growth. By the time she reached college at Skidmore in Saratoga Springs, Hannah was majoring in French Language and Literature with a minor in Studio Art. Hannah lived in France for her junior year and for a year after she graduated. That curiosity and commitment to hands on learning is something she now passes on to her students, whether they're reading literature or fixing their own bikes.





Ally and Hannah at Gorge Rd, Queenstown and Nicole and Hannah also in Queenstown
PC: Gianna Ossello



Her path into the outdoor world began with guiding. Summers were spent rafting in Washington and Colorado and winters in ski towns. Eventually, the seasonal cycle gave way to year-round adventure - leading raft trips in Norway and New Zealand, living out of dry bags and duffels, and learning what it meant to be resourceful in any environment. “Whitewater gave me a solid foundation in risk management, safety, and first aid,” she says. “It taught me how to think ahead and adapt quickly - skills that come in handy even when we’re riding a Bike Park. And more importantly, it made me versatile - things I try to impart on our students who are often used to having everything they need at their fingertips.”

Though she didn’t plan to become a teacher, Hannah now teaches literature and often reflects on her own learning journey. “I remember how important good teachers were to my own development, even if I didn’t appreciate it at the time.” Now, she focuses on creating that same foundation for her students - pushing them to think critically, creatively, and with resilience. “They already do hard things on the bike. But my goal is for them to bring that same dedication to every part of life.

Program Director| Hannah Tay

Even if they lose their way for a bit, I want them to have those building blocks in place to come back to." Hannah also prioritizes the less glamorous, but essential life skills: doing your laundry, cleaning up after yourself, cooking your own meals. "It's about becoming someone people want to live with, someone who pulls their weight. These things foster confidence and independence. And I think that's just as important as any lesson on a trail."

Team dynamics matter too and not just the kind that show up in sports. Though mountain biking can seem like an individual pursuit, Hannah emphasizes the community aspect of WCA. "I grew up playing a lot of team sports, and I love how we strive to build that same dynamic here," she says. "It's not just about how well you ride. It's how you live with others, how you communicate, resolve conflict, swallow your pride, and come back to the table."

At the end of the day, Hannah hopes her students leave WCA as whole people - confident in themselves, respectful of others, and unafraid to be a little silly or weird. "The world doesn't need more of the same," she says. "I just want them to stay true to themselves, be able to see things from other people's perspectives, and know how to communicate and problem-solve. That's the kind of rider, and person, I hope we're building here." Hannah would love to see more of her students experience the rawness of bikepacking - not just the adrenaline of downhill, but the grit, patience, and problem-solving that come with self-supported backcountry travel. "It builds this different kind of confidence," she explains. "Knowing how to cook when you're hungry, fix what's broken, and make things work with what you have - it's not just about outdoor survival. It's about believing in your ability to handle life."



For Millie Aldridge, life has always been shaped by the water. Growing up sailing from a young age, she competed at the highest levels, representing Great Britain on the youth sailing team and earning a European championship title in 2018. But it wasn't just competition that drew her to the ocean, it was the feeling of freedom and connection that came with it. That same feeling led her to kitesurfing, a sport her family had embraced while she was away at university. Not wanting to be left behind, she gave it a try, and was hooked. Years later, that love of wind and water brought her to WCA's Kite Academy, where she now teaches Government & Economics and Literature of the Americas while coaching students both in and out of the classroom.

Millie's path to WCA wasn't a straight one. After earning a degree in Economics and Business from the University of Exeter, she went to Australia to travel and kite. She had been interested in WCA, but while riding at her local spot, she saw a group of students out on the water. The chance to teach in a dynamic environment while continuing to travel was exactly what she had been looking for. "I wanted to experience new cultures and do a job that had real meaning," she says.

That sense of purpose is at the core of Millie's teaching. She believes that learning should be engaging, interactive, and deeply tied to the world around us. "When I think back to my own education, the moments that stood out were the ones where I was having fun, when learning didn't feel like a chore but an experience," she says.

TEACHER FEATURE
MILLIE ALDERIDGE



She strives to create those moments for her students, bringing subjects to life through their ever changing locations. “If you’re teaching human rights or apartheid, there’s no better place to do it than Cape Town. If you’re discussing economics, getting students out into a marketplace to ask real questions makes it tangible.” Whether it's visiting museums in Paracas, playing soccer with locals in Brazil, or writing by the sea, Millie ensures that her students learn not just from books, but from the world around them.

Beyond academics, Millie hopes to instill in her students a deeper appreciation for being present. “Life begins when you put the phone down,” she says. When she first started teaching at WCA, she was struck by how dependent students were on their devices. “There’s so much to learn from the people and places around you that you’ll never find on a screen.” She encourages her students to embrace their surroundings, whether that means writing from observation, engaging with the community, or simply soaking in a sunset after a day on the water.

For Millie, success isn’t measured by grades alone but by growth - both personal and academic. One of her proudest teaching moments was watching a student who had never studied in English before go from struggling to writing expressively and confidently by the end of the year.

“It’s not about me as a teacher; it’s about them realizing their own potential.” Ultimately, Millie hopes her students walk away from WCA with more than just knowledge - they leave with confidence, adaptability, and an appreciation for the world around them. “Kiting teaches them resilience. Traveling teaches them perspective. And I hope, in my classroom, they learn that they are capable of far more than they realize.”





Photos by Jack Salmon and Merle Mönster

In January of 2025, Paddle Tribal Waters Academy (PTWA) students gathered on Chile's Alto Bio Bio River for the second annual semester program that teaches Indigenous Youth to whitewater kayak while earning a high school education. The semester offered students the chance to travel, live in community, and take high school classes while advancing their whitewater kayaking skills to prepare for the first-ever source-to-sea descent of the newly free-flowing Klamath River.

Kiah Schaepe and Wil Henkel comprise the PTWA leadership team. As Head Coach and Program Director, respectively, Kiah and Wil are responsible for leading operations in the field. Wil oversees logistics, travel, and academics, while Kiah designs the daily paddling curriculum, manages risk, and guides students' technical and personal development on the water.

Both are accomplished kayakers with a passion that goes beyond sport. They first met in Ecuador, where Kiah was teaching at World Class Kayak Academy, a position he held for five years in addition to taking on the Kayak Head Coach position in 2024. He invited Wil and an Ecuadorian river advocate, Diego Robles, to speak to his Environmental Science class about the devastating impacts of illegal mining on Ecuadorian rivers and Indigenous communities. At the time, Wil was in Ecuador helping Diego launch Yakuchuris, a kayaking program designed to teach Indigenous youth from the Río Jatunyacu to paddle—an effort to empower them to resist large-scale gold mining operations in the Amazon.

KIAH SCHAEPE
WIL HENKEL

PTWA LEADERSHIP









PTWA Swiftwater Rescue Training on the McKenzie River, California

What started as a guest lecture turned into a partnership rooted in shared purpose. Kiah and Wil soon discovered they had grown up just across the border from one another—Kiah in Chilliwack, BC, and Wil in Bellingham, WA. Both learned to paddle on neighboring watersheds, and both pursued educations that reflected their connection to the environment. Kiah earned a degree in Biology and Environmental Science from the University of Victoria. Wil designed an interdisciplinary major at Western Washington University's Fairhaven College titled Healing Through Reciprocity with the Land: A Narrative Shift in Settler Consciousness. His thesis explored how storytelling can change cultural attitudes toward land use and community.

Kiah and Wil's shared background informs their approach to paddling today—one that is grounded in stewardship, education, and social responsibility. "Paddlers can be very individualistic," Kiah explains. Kayaking trips can "often fall into the trap of focusing on what paddlers can get from the river. Kayakers go to these places, use them to improve, and then leave—without considering the impact on local communities or the rivers themselves." Wil reflects on the ways in which PTWA has helped cement a change in his approach to kayaking: "It's remarkable to see a collective group that are all learning to paddle as a team from different communities but from the same river. I've been learning a ton about ways in which I can shift my perspective of rivers, of being on the water, of being a teacher, being an instructor and also ways in which I want to change my relationship to kayaking."

Paddle Tribal Waters' approach to community and athletic development embodies these same goals and more. "PTWA feels like it's way less about the individual," Kiah says. Through his role as a coach, Kiah's goals are to help students become lifelong paddlers with a healthy relationship to the river and to equip students with the skills to become instructors who can return home and teach others to paddle. Kiah reflects on the ability for PTWA Youth to bring kayaking knowledge and skills to their communities: "the ripple effect of PTWA is so much bigger than just the impact on its participants."

WHAT NEXT?

IN MAY, THIRTY-THREE SENIORS WILL GRADUATE FROM WCA AND MOVE ON TO LIFE'S NEXT ADVENTURE

Kayak	Sam Larson	*Western Washington University*
	Jackie Kimmel	*University of Washington*
	Skylar Borof	*Fort Lewis College*
	Sasha Sachs	*University of Victoria*
	Benny Convery	*University of Victoria*
	Micah Pfeiffer	*Montana State University*
	Magnus Peterson	*Western Washington University*
	Sharly Webster	*Laval University*
	Avery Lauferrae	*Western Washington*
	Miles van der Linden	*Appalachian State University*
	Sebastian Rosser	*Chattanooga State Community College*
	Maite Herrera	*Gap Year in Chile*
Kite	Felix Steindorfer	*Military Service then University of Innsbruck*
	Pola Lodzinska	*University of Lisbon, Portugal*
	Oliwier Kania	*University of Lisbon*
	Franciszek Salata	*Jagiellonian University, Krakow*
Climb	Marcus Fulton	*Appalachian State University*
	Adelaide Kreidel	Sewanee: *University of the South*
	Sophie	*Cal Poly Humboldt*
	Elias Javier	*Colorado State University*
	Eli Sevensma	*Appalachian State University*
	Alex AiChang	*Colorado School of Mines*
	William Kraus	*Middlebury College*
	Charles Baker	*Appalachian State University*
	Henry Carter	*Covenant College*
	Mayu Cereceda	*Undecided*
	Peyton Leiken	*Shasta Western Colorado University*
MTB	Mattson Clement	*Montana State University*
	Greyson Gerber	*Montana State University*
	Emerson Sparks	*Appalachian State University*
	Alexa Meredith	*Capilano University*
	Ella Easton	*Gap Year in New Zealand*
	Tatum Marsh	*Montana State University*
PTWA	Ruby Williams	*Fort Lewis College*
	A:de'ts Rogers	*Undecided*



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