WORLD CLASS ACADEMY

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER



ACADEMICS

Letter from the Principal
Classroom Feature
Teacher Features
LOA Poetry

ATHLETICS

Quarter Destinations
Student Spotlight
Student Nature Poetry
TCA and Spain

CHARACTER

Senior Capstones
Student Photography
Graduation Sneak Peek
What's Next?



CONTENTS

Letter from the Principal.....2

Quarter One Destinations.....3

Quarter Two Destinations.....4

Graduation Sneak Peek.....6

Classroom Feature: Sam Steele....9

MTB Student Poetry.....12

Student Photography.....14

Head Coach: Jackson Wetherill.....22

Literature of the Americas Poetry....25

Meet Marten Koblischke.....28

Senior Capstone 31

Teacher Feature: Claire Davies.....36

Spain: A WCA Tradition.....38

Meet Anabelle Crum Gross.....42

Post Graduation Plans.....44

LETTER FROM THE PRINCIPAL



Spring is an exciting and reflective time on the WCA calendar. Spring represents a culmination, but also an end. This in turn signals time for something new. At the end of a school year what we have learned through the journey doesn't become more acute or become mixed into some grand crescendo of a moment, but rather these experiences lead us to the place where we are now: the people we have become. What we do with that is up to each of us. How do these experiences lead us to what is next? Spring is a time of action.

And while Spring is a time to embrace changes, it is also a time for reflection. I look back on this 2025-2026 school year through the lens of this newsletter and I see a winding path of experiences, adventure, and growth, leading us through the peaks and valleys of a life in motion. I see Spanish limestone, and New Zealand mountains that stare off towards the ocean, and Australian flat-water that looks like a mirror begging to be broken, and I see a brilliantly blue Patagonian river lazily wandering through rugged andean peaks only to gather in chaos and raw power as it is squeezed into a canyon. I see our teams of students and faculty, influenced by these landscapes and changed by their experiences. Spring is a time of action, but also of reflection.

We must take nothing for granted. Each school year is unique, never to be duplicated in the exact same way. Our school newsletters not only help us create a path forward, but also an opportunity to preserve what we have learned and also to preserve what we have experienced. We welcome you into this journey into the past. In it you will see much hope for the future.

Re-Think Education.



Aaron 'Capo' Rettig

THE YEAR BEGAN IN . . .



Uldemolins, Spain

Where the **climbers** harnessed their endurance from Greece to go "a muerte" on the storied limestone cliffs of Siurana and Margalef with the odd trip to Barcelona on rest days.



Queenstown, New Zealand

Where the **mountain bikers** rode epic enduro, bike park laps, some of the most famous dirt jumps in the world, and more while also planting trees and riding over 1,185 km for the scholarship fundraiser.



Western Australia

Where the **kiters** harnessed the power of the "Fremantle Doctor," enjoying exceptionally consistent thermal winds and cozy cabins along the rugged coastline of Margaret River.



Patagonia, Chile

Where the **kayakers** traveled by plane, boat, and car from the steep basalt creeks of central chile to the big water paradise of the futaleufú river and a new run for WCA: the Maipo River.

AND CONTINUED IN...

Catalonia, Spain

Where the **mountain bikers** took advantage of spring weather and rode boutique bike parks, Euro-style enduro trails, and famous Catalonian Dirt Jumps.



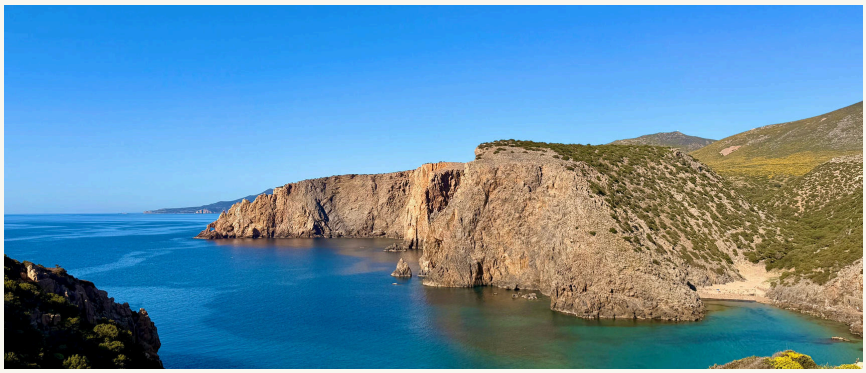
Blue Mountains, Australia

Where the **climbers** rounded out the year in the rainforest of Australia, combining endurance and bouldering power on epic sandstone cliffs, and visiting a wildlife refuge along the way.



Sardinia, Italy

Where the kiters immersed themselves in Mediterranean living while riding the shallow lagoons of Punta Trettu and using flatwater to master new tricks.



European Alps

Where the **kayakers** worked on tailies and other downriver freestyle on deep European eddylines, pairing days on the water with hikes in the alps and homemade Italian pasta.




W


C


A

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.







LA FENASOSA, SPAIN

The **Mountain Bike Academy** gets the best of both worlds for graduation this year with a ceremony in a Spanish castle that also doubles as the base for world renowned La Fenasosa Bike Park in Southern Spain. Following MTB Academy tradition, the day before graduation will be dedicated to a riding day for all students and families together. For an extra splash of fun: Fenasosa does not have chairlifts, rather a fleet of camo-painted trucks that they will shuttle everyone in for the WCA families ride day.

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.





KATOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

The Climbing Academy holds their graduation ceremony at The Carrington Hotel. Opened in 1883, The Carrington was first named the Great Western Hotel and was a renowned accommodation in the early days when the Blue Mountains were visited by tourist for their healing/medicinal properties. This space embodies the grand history of the Blueys. Following the graduation ceremony families enjoy a buffet lunch and students sign yearbooks to conclude the year.

SARDINIA, ITALY

Over in Southern Sardinia, the **Kite Academy** families will join the team for a kite session at Punta Trettu; a sand spit that divides the Sardinian Sea and the lagoon of Sant Antioco and catches the mistral and sirocco winds. The end of year celebrations continue on Friday with a parents appreciation evening at Kite House Sardinia with antipasti and a chance for families to watch films from the year. The graduation ceremony will be held on the patio at Sa Ruscitta, a family owned restaurant and farmstay, nestled among the olive groves on the island of Sant'Antioco. Followed by a traditional Sardinian lunch of homemade pasta, seasonal vegetables, locally sourced meats and cheeses.





CLASSROOM FEATURE
SAM STEELE

At the top of a hike in Slovenia's Julian Alps, Sam Steele and his Physics students stood on a 6,000 meter peak, staring down at the Soča River where they paddled each day. "What velocity would you need to travel at to launch off this peak to land in the river?" Sam asked jokingly. His students jumped into action, estimating the horizontal distance to the river, wind speed, the height of terminal velocity – everything short of drawing a freebody diagram on top of a mountain.

Fast forward to the end of quarter four, and Sam is bringing this hypothetical physics problem to life for his class's final assessment. Students are building a trebuchet (a double lever catapult) with materials from a hardware store found in Austria and predicting launch velocities using the conservation of energy and conservation of angular momentum principles. The class will have to account for external factors in their calculations and back calculate the actual launch velocity to evaluate the accuracy of both measurements.

Sam Steele teaches physics and pre-calculus at the Kayak Academy. His approach to both subjects is rooted in the conviction that students learn best when they can see the material living in the world around them. In his combined three years as both a student and teacher at World Class, Sam has learned how to utilize the varied and sometimes distracting WCA environments to create opportunities for learning through real-world application.

Sam's willingness to follow the thread is something he developed over time. Early in his teaching career, Sam kept things tightly structured, steering class back on course whenever conversation threatened to wander. Over the last two years in the classroom, Sam's thinking has shifted. He has found that a little room to roam, especially when students are genuinely engaged, tends to open up learning opportunities that a stricter approach would have closed off.

When Sam's physics class studied the difference between static and kinetic friction, the classroom full of skiers worked through exactly what happens when you skin up a steep slope, hit the tipping point, and suddenly lose your grip on the snow, thus breaking from static into kinetic friction. "I saw this lightbulb connection for a lot of these kids," Sam recalls. Same for angular momentum which became a lesson in kickflipping, a fundamental kayak trick. Through physics, students learned why pulling your arms close to your body snaps a kickflip around faster on the river.

This year, that shift has shown up in an unexpected place: his students have started requesting additional class sessions. "Having their motivation and engagement be so high to the point where they're requesting an additional class makes me feel really proud," Sam says. These late-night study sessions have taken on something of a college dorm room energy, with students gathered together to work through problems and talk out their confusion, doing exactly the kind of collaborative learning that no formal lesson plan could quite replicate.



A WCA Halloween Tradition:
"Dress Like Sam Steele Day"



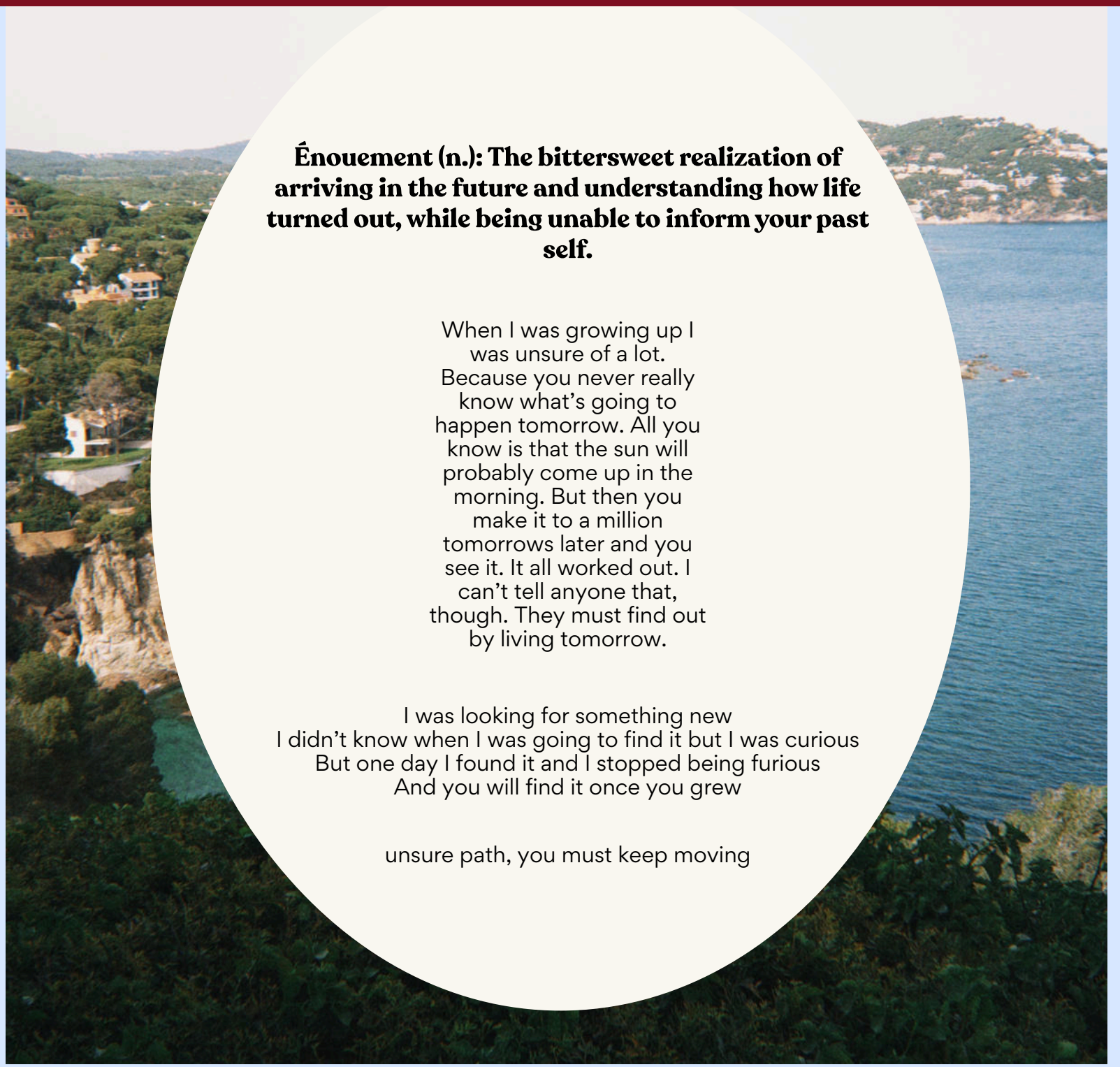
Sam's labs carry the same spirit of improvisation. World Class does not have a fully stocked laboratory, and Sam has come to see that limitation as an opportunity. He and his students head into town, find whatever simple materials they can get their hands on, and build the experiment from scratch. At the end of semester one in New Zealand, Sam organized an egg drop lab that asked students to apply every major concept from the semester into one project. Kinematics, free body diagrams, energy, impulse, linear momentum: all of it fed into the central question of whether a homemade capsule could protect an egg on impact. Students had to calculate the answer before they found out for certain. "I think it really does drive home these ideas," Sam says, "and also just introduces some fun into the class."

It is worth noting that Sam did not arrive at this kind of teaching through teaching experience alone. He knows what it feels like to be on the other side of a WCA classroom. Sam was a World Class student himself in 2016 and 2017. As a student in Nicole Mansfield's physics class, Sam and one other student held class for several weeks in the stairwell of a hotel in Nepal, a whiteboard propped up against the wall, sitting on the stairs. It was, by any conventional standard, an absurd classroom setup. But Sam remembers it as the perfect place to learn. In Evan Smith's Calculus Class, Sam found himself on a twelve hour bus, stuck on a problem, and able to simply turn to his teacher and ask for help. "These crazy situations," Sam reflects, "I never would have thought I'd experience in a high school class."

Now he is the one creating memorable experiences for students. Sam's physics class this year has nine students, which, he laughs, feels large by World Class standards. But even at that size, he knows exactly where each student is at, what they struggle with, and how to adjust his explanations to meet them where they are. Some of his stronger students have stepped into informal leadership roles, helping to tutor classmates who are still working to get their footing. The class, as Sam describes it, has become a community, one where students are looking out for each other's learning and not just their own. It is a long way from a traditional high school physics classroom with thirty kids in rows. It is also, not coincidentally, a lot like the classes Sam once enjoyed as a student.

STUDENT POETRY
MTB ACADEMY

Ally Faller begins each class with a creative writing prompt. The following assignement asked students to choose an “emotion word” to write a five sentence story encapsulating but not using that word. Next, students passed their paper to the person on their right who wrote a poem inspired by the story. One more pass, and the final person wrote a six word story inspired by the poem.



Énouement (n.): The bittersweet realization of arriving in the future and understanding how life turned out, while being unable to inform your past self.

When I was growing up I
was unsure of a lot.
Because you never really
know what’s going to
happen tomorrow. All you
know is that the sun will
probably come up in the
morning. But then you
make it to a million
tomorrows later and you
see it. It all worked out. I
can’t tell anyone that,
though. They must find out
by living tomorrow.

I was looking for something new
I didn’t know when I was going to find it but I was curious
But one day I found it and I stopped being furious
And you will find it once you grew

unsure path, you must keep moving

Definitions by John Koening, The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows



Sonder (n) :
The realization that everyone has a story, carrying on an invisible, elaborate, and epic life.

I was walking on the street between people until something did click. I saw that each face had stories, fears, dreams, even invisible loves. There was when I understand that I wasn't in the center of anything. Just one more person.

All I am is one in a billion
Everybody is similar but no one the same
We're all doing what seems like a game
It's possible this thought's come to a million

You all have dreams. Me too.

Onism (n):
The Awareness of How Little of the World You'll Experience

I stood on a crowded train, watching strangers get off at every stop, all with lives I would never know. A woman spoke to her friend about a place I'd never been. A man beside me stared at photos of people that I'd never meet. Outside buildings passed quickly, all holding a story that I will never enter. When the train doors opened, I got off knowing that I will only ever live this one life.

I always look and see better lives
Although I'm happy with mine
I just hope it will work out fine
I watch her just sit there as she cries

Others pass living an unknown life



JOHANNA PUETMANN

JULIEN FOURNELLE



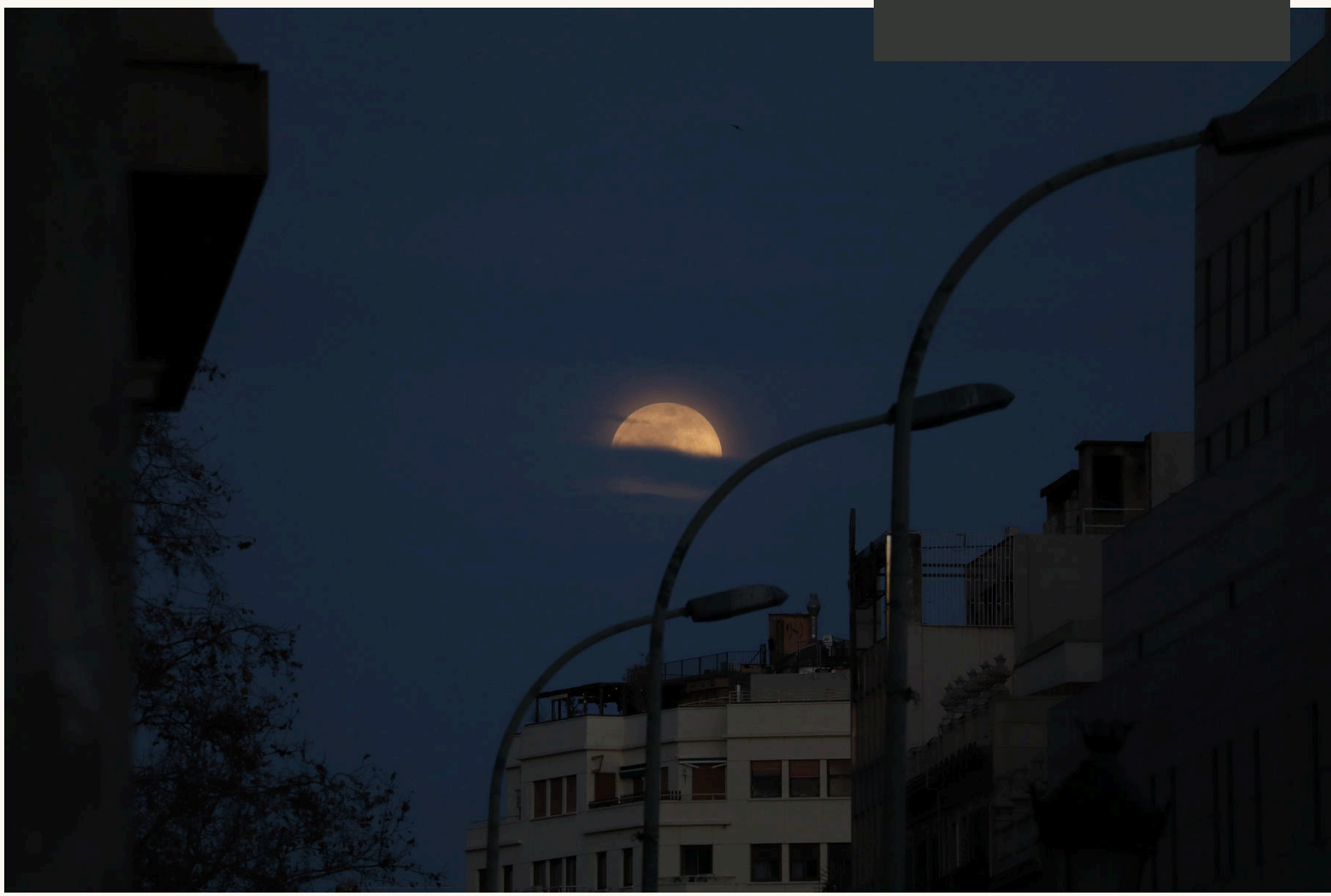


JAXON WHITE





BENJAMIN NIEDER





ALINA OROPEZA





ANABELLE CRUM GROSS





SUZANNAH BACON





HENRY SCHAFER





LEAH DANSEREAU





HEAD COACH JACKSON WETHERILL

For Jackson Wetherill success in climbing has never been measured solely in grades or competition wins. Having spent over a decade in the sport, from youth competitions to outdoor projects, he's found that the real fulfillment comes from a sustainable love of climbing, meaningful growth, and the ability to share that joy with others. "Competing was fun when I was younger, but it never felt quite right. Outdoor climbing felt more inspiring, more lasting," Jackson reflects.

Born into climbing, Jackson's parents ran a gym in Helena, Montana - Jackson's first experiences with the sport were as much about community as technique. By high school, he was coaching younger climbers. A year spent as a ski instructor at Jackson Hole further reinforced his passion for working with kids, "I realized then that coaching and teaching could be something I did over the long run" he says. After college at Tufts University, Jackson found his way to WCA in the spring of 2023, joining mid-year as faculty. "It was crazy how it worked out, and I'm so grateful that the team trusted me. Living and climbing with the students, working alongside people I respected and admired - it was some of the most fun I've ever had".



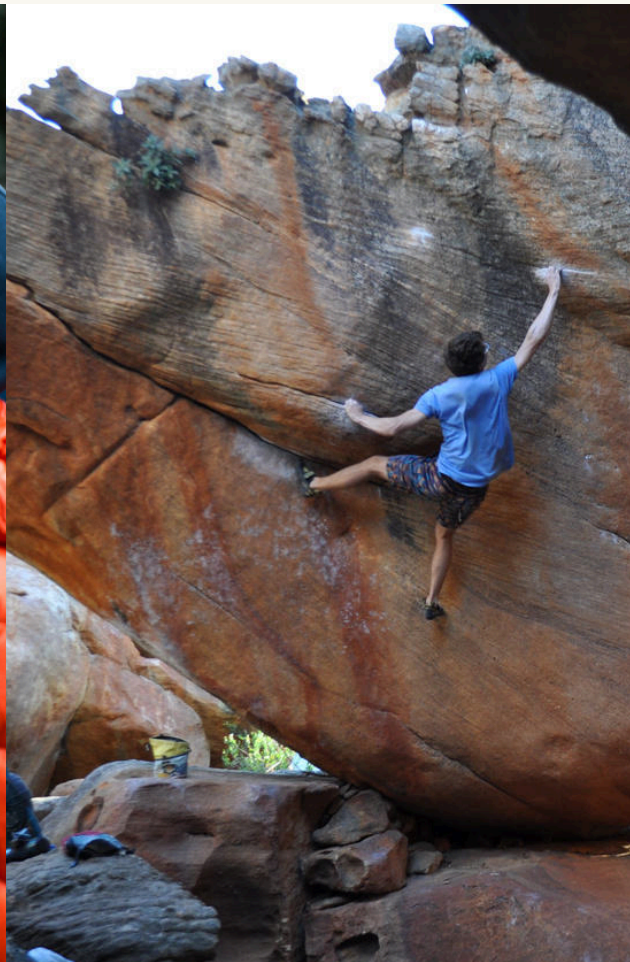
The experience cemented a desire to return and grow into the Head Coach role, a position he now embraces with a mix of excitement and responsibility. “I think about all the incredible people who’ve held this role before me, from Brandon Smith to Kyle O’Meara to Lohan Lizin. **All of these former Head Coaches mentored me in some way, and I try to honor that history by being the best example I can be for our students”.**

Jackson’s climbing philosophy centers on balance: pushing limits while maintaining joy. The first quarter of 2023 in Rocklands stands out as a highlight in his own climbing. He sent his first V13, El Corazon, on a day that tested his patience, perseverance, and composure. “I fell off the top out once, but kept a good headspace and sent it a few goes later. It was one of those moments where I felt like I was modeling the kind of behavior I want the students to see: working hard, staying calm, and not letting setbacks define you”. His approach to training at WCA mirrors this philosophy. “We supplement climbing with workouts that are fun, varied, and thoughtful. Core work, yoga, meditation, journaling - we use these tools to help students build strength, focus, and resilience. Meditation, in particular, has been amazing for teaching them how to sit with discomfort, focus on their posture, and strengthen their mindset”.

Perhaps the most profound experiences, Jackson says, come from watching students grow through experiencing challenges. One day of deep water soloing in Rocklands exemplifies this. A 40 foot jump into the water tested nerves, courage, and trust - both in themselves and in each other. “The kids brought such incredible energy and support for one another. Watching them step off that edge, one by one, and then tackle the climb - it was magic. That’s what coaching is all about: giving them space to explore, fail, and succeed, and helping them take those lessons beyond the crag”. Above all, Jackson prioritizes the happiness and growth of his students over climbing outcomes, “I care more about their experience here than the grades they send. We climb to have fun, to solve puzzles, and to grow as people. My job is to create space for that to happen and to model it in my own climbing.”

For Jackson, the best part of coaching isn’t what he accomplishes - it’s what his students take with them. The skills, mindset, and confidence they build at WCA are tools for life, on the wall and off. And as he watches each climber push limits, overcome fears, and celebrate progress, Jackson is reminded why he keeps returning: to share the love of climbing in a way that lasts a lifetime.





NATURE POETRY

LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAS

Point of View of the River
by Max Lynch

I woke up to the sky crying down on me, my eddies filled and my rapids grow with each of the skies tears. Today only the brave came to enjoy me, kickflipping and laughing their way from my head until my toes, my toes no longer dipped into the great ocean, now they were a part of it. In the afternoon the stuck up jetskiers came barreling up me, scarring my sacred body for life. Kayaks left their bright marking upon my rocks changing me forever. As I fell to rest this night, my eddys started to empty and my rapids went to sleep. The fish that dance through my body began to settle in for the night. A lonely kayak drifted over me, guided by the moon. This tucked me in and I fell asleep.



Us and Them
Sky Couvreux

The trees are not happy
the trees are not sad

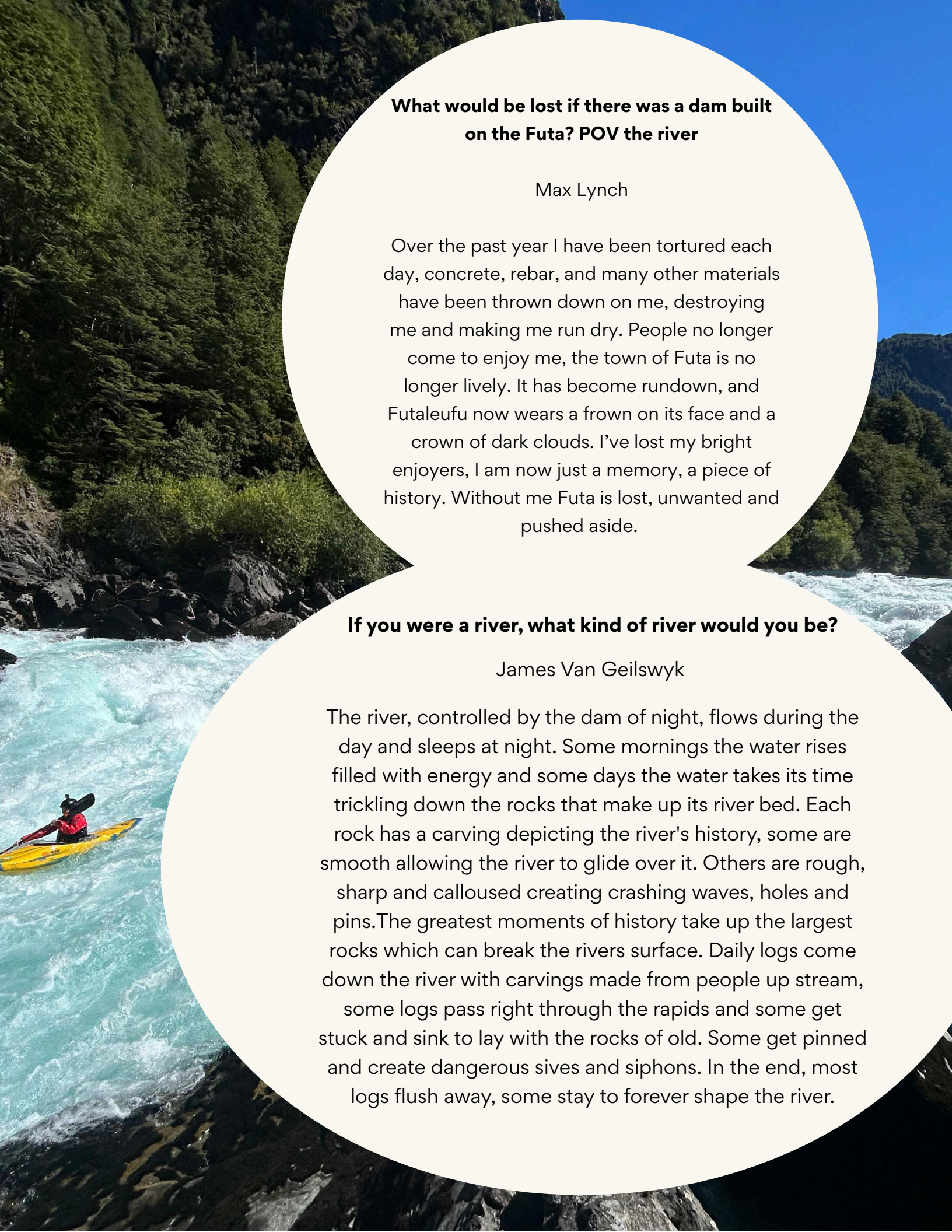
They see all you could
and might have had.
They see all the good.
they see all the bad.
Yet they are not happy.
Yet they are not mad.

They rise from the ground,
not caring if they're found.
Might not be noticed at all,
until they grow, far beyond tall
and blaze in a self lighted fire in the fall.
Yet they do not care at all.

They might be felled,
thrown back to the ground.
Used to build up
yet another town.
That would be fine.
They pay it no mind.
The horror, after all, is ours to find.

They are not happy,
they are not mad.
But perhaps when we leave,
they will be glad.





What would be lost if there was a dam built on the Futa? POV the river

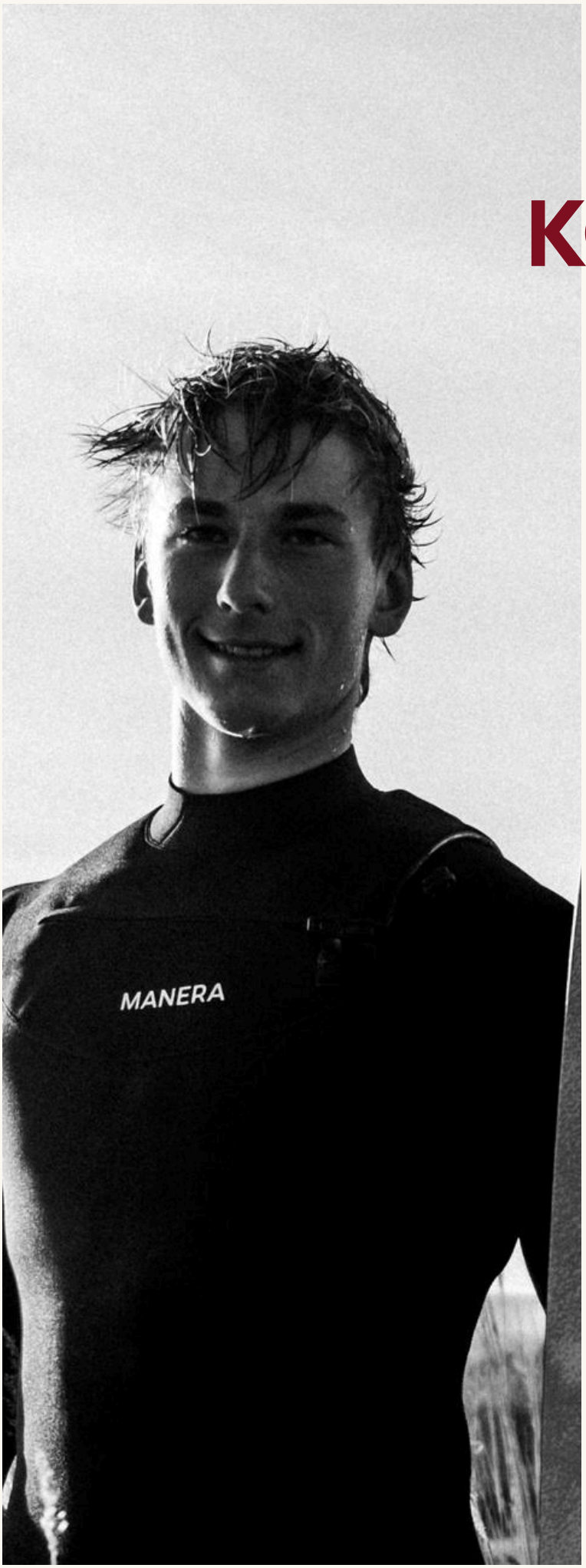
Max Lynch

Over the past year I have been tortured each day, concrete, rebar, and many other materials have been thrown down on me, destroying me and making me run dry. People no longer come to enjoy me, the town of Futa is no longer lively. It has become rundown, and Futaleufu now wears a frown on its face and a crown of dark clouds. I've lost my bright enjoyers, I am now just a memory, a piece of history. Without me Futa is lost, unwanted and pushed aside.

If you were a river, what kind of river would you be?

James Van Geilswyk

The river, controlled by the dam of night, flows during the day and sleeps at night. Some mornings the water rises filled with energy and some days the water takes its time trickling down the rocks that make up its river bed. Each rock has a carving depicting the river's history, some are smooth allowing the river to glide over it. Others are rough, sharp and calloused creating crashing waves, holes and pins.The greatest moments of history take up the largest rocks which can break the rivers surface. Daily logs come down the river with carvings made from people up stream, some logs pass right through the rapids and some get stuck and sink to lay with the rocks of old. Some get pinned and create dangerous sives and siphons. In the end, most logs flush away, some stay to forever shape the river.



MARTEN KOBLISCHKE

STUDENT FEATURE

Meet Marten, a 17 year old kite student from Germany. Marten, who has recently podiumed at multiple international kite competitions in Big Air and Freestyle is one of the junior kiteboarders pushing the sport to new heights. For Marten, progression in kiteboarding didn't come from a single breakthrough moment - it came from growing up in a place where the wind and water were part of daily life.

Marten first learned to kite on an island off the coast of Germany, a place defined by shifting conditions and year round water access. "Warm summers to cold sessions in the winter," he says. "It's great for all kinds of watersports, and even on days when it's not strong enough for kiting, I'm always doing something with a kite or on the water." That consistency shaped his relationship with the sport early on. Kiting wasn't an occasional activity - it was the default.

Over time, what started as fun on the water turned into something more intentional. Marten began entering small local competitions, then gradually moved into bigger and more demanding events. The more he rode, the more he realized how far he could take it. "I realised this is my passion," he says. "I started small and built it into bigger and bigger competitions."

What ultimately pushed things to the next level was the decision to combine school with training. That search led him to World Class Kite Academy. After connecting with the program, Marten joined the school competition in Sardinia, which marked the beginning of a new phase - training and traveling with structure, purpose, and access to some of the best kite locations in the world.

Through WCKA, he began traveling to internationally recognized big air destinations like Cape Town and Tarifa. Those environments accelerated everything. “Winning one of my first Big Air contests in Cape Town motivated me even more,” he says. For Marten, the motivation has always been simple: enjoyment of the sport, combined with curiosity about how far he can push it. “What sparked my interest was first of all the fun and joy kiting brings me,” he says. “And the idea that this passion could turn into a professional career, and seeing how far I can push my own riding.”





His Head Coach, Merle Moenster, agrees

“Marten definitely shows an outstanding amount of dedication, not only in his athletic progression but also managing his school and personal life around it. His success doesn't only come from being a talented rider, but from hard work and the big vision to progress onto the world stage of kitesurfing at only 17 years of age. He's putting in the effort, and seeks every opportunity to train. Seeing Marten being stoked and smiling before every session is everything a coach can ask for - this passion is the driving force in athlete development. Out of the water, Marten spends hours to critically reflect and analyze his riding, to visualize his trick goals, to watch and learn from others, and to fine-tune his gear. He knows exactly what it needs and what he wants, and this mindset is making the difference!”

Training and competing with WCKA has played a major role in that progression. Moving from mostly solo sessions at home to riding alongside other high-level athletes changed both his perspective and his approach. “The change from only kiting at home to big air spots around the world opened a door to the kiting scene,” he explains. “Training with other students helped me see different sides of training and push my boundaries on and off the water.” That environment has also created constant feedback loops - watching others ride, sharing ideas, and learning new ways to approach tricks and conditions.

Preparation for major competitions has become more structured as a result. Ahead of events like Lords of Tram, Marten travels early to get used to the conditions. “To prepare I went to France early to get comfortable with the spot and the super strong, gusty winds in Barcarès,” he says. “I was focused on myself and showing the tricks I’ve been working on.”

He also spent time with the F-One team at a Next Generation camp, refining his approach and building a competition plan leading into the event. Despite the high stakes, Marten describes competition in a surprisingly grounded way. “What I enjoy most is how focused you are in the moment,” he says. “It feels less like a competition and more like just going out and kiting as well as you can.”

Before a heat, his mindset is simple: remove distractions and focus on execution. “I only focus on myself and what I want to do,” he says. “Not letting outside distractions get in the way.”

A key part of his development at WCKA has also come from the environment around him. Training alongside other dedicated athletes has made progression more natural - and more consistent. “The team vibe is something I really enjoy,” he says. “Doing workouts, kite sessions, coaching sessions together is more fun than alone. It also pushes me to try things I wouldn’t normally do.” That structure has translated into more time on the water and more intentional training overall. “With WCKA I have the opportunity to kite so many hours,” he adds. “It adds up to really good preparation to progress and get ready for competitions.”





COMPARATIVE LITERATURE **SENIOR CAPSTONE**

All Seniors at World Class Academy take Comparative Literature, a course that emphasizes reading and writing broadly across genres and through critical lenses. Which primary texts and lessons students learn will depend on the teacher, academy, destination and school year, but the one constant between all of our Comparative Literature courses in the Senior Capstone.

The Capstone is a multi draft, research paper that each student writes in the final quarter of their senior year. The Capstone asks students to identify a personally relevant question whose answer can be evaluated through in-depth research and analysis. Seniors use primary resources to produce a scientifically formatted research paper answering a question of their own design and choosing.

Before classes begin the research and analysis process, students study *good questions*; both those that have shaped the world, and those that matter only to the questioner. Thus, Capstone Research Papers begin with each student's personal reflection, explaining the genesis of their quesiton.

OLLIE GOODELL



How does Chronic Wasting Disease spread in animal populations and what risk does it pose to humans?

I have grown up learning as much outside as I have inside the classroom. When I have free time I spend it outside, in the mountains or on the river. I watch the way the world works, the snow, rain and wind, the trees and the animals. Since I was a little kid I have been hunting. Hunting is not just about harvesting an animal for me it is about understanding the land, respecting the wildlife, and being part of nature.

Over the past couple of years Chronic Wasting Disease has become a huge problem within the wild animal populations where I live, in Montana. Animals that have been infected with CWD move slowly, look very thin and often seem very unaware of their surroundings. Local deer in my neighborhood have hair falling off their bodies creating bald spots. It is as if the animals are wasting away while they are still alive. At the same time hunting has become more uncertain. There are fewer animals in some areas, and even when we are successful, there is always the question of whether the meat is safe to eat. Because of this, testing for CWD has become a normal part of the hunting process.

One thing that frustrates me in school is that we often learn about big global issues, but not always about problems that directly affect our own communities. CWD is a real issue where I live, especially in the state of Montana, where hunting, ranching, and wildlife all play large roles in many people's daily lives. CWD connects to Montana's health, environment and even our economy.

This all really stuck with me and led me to my research question. I want to understand how CWD spreads, what it is doing to animal populations, and whether it could eventually affect humans. This question matters to me because it is not just something I read about. It is something I see, experience and have to think about every fall, on October 24th when Rifle season opens.

LINUS SCHNEIDER



Life is short, and every day, every living being comes closer to the “end“. In our 80 years on earth, we want to see what the world has to offer and enjoy life to its fullest.

Since the industrial age traveling got more accessible for people and they looked further than just to the next closest city. By ship, plane, train and car people could travel now to different countries and explore whole new continents.

My life has deeply been richened by traveling. Since I can remember I flew with my parents to different places year by year. Especially now with WCKA traveling became even more, which makes me think about the effects this behavior could have on the world. Another of my passions, besides kiting and traveling, is nature, the forest, mountains and oceans. Where I live, in Western Germany, we have big forest landscapes around which I grew up. As kids we played in the forest, built our own mountain bike tracks and went sledding.

We still do that, but I notice differences: The winter got milder, snow got less. In the summer we have longer dry periods, forests are being cut down because the trees die and we are getting more natural disasters like flooding. There is no doubt that climate is changing in a bad way and future generations will never experience what we experienced, but where to find a solution?

Looking at WCKA or people in general who travel a lot, one major part is emissions of the planes we take to get to all these special places. When I was contemplating this lifestyle, another interest of mine helped me form my question. I like physics and how things work. Natural science in general is a very interesting subject to me. Understanding correlations, their effects and what you could change, thinking deeply about problems and trying to solve them. Considering all my interests, I build the Question:

Is Carbon neutral civil aviation likely considering Liquid Hydrogen as an alternative fuel?



AIDEN ALVAREZ

What are the effects of cultural burning in California and how has its absense for the past century changed the environment?

From a young age, fire has always fascinated me, as I am sure it fascinates most little boys. I would always run my fingers through the flames, or heat up a paper clip just to poke holes through the candle. I knew that it could hurt, I had my fair share of first and second degree burns, but it wouldn't stop me.

It was only later in life that I saw the devastation fire could bring. Growing up in California, I have seen swaths of land burnt down to blackened tree trunks speckling the landscape, and seen the rubble where peoples houses once stood in contrast to the surrounding. As the years have continued I have had family and friends evacuated from their homes as the wall of flame drew ever closer. But I have also seen the old practices of cultural burning begin to take place once again, so called "new" fire prevention methods that have been around for hundreds of years but were stopped for a long time.

Cultural burning is the practice of having small controlled fires to prevent the build up under growth, and ideally, lessen the intensity of forest fires. When it was explained to me for the first time my brain immediately went to the phrase, "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires" from the figure of Smokey The Bear. Wasn't fire bad for the forest, and weren't they always out of control things that destroyed everything? After all this is what we were taught from preschool onward.

It was only later on that I began to understand the benefit of fire in certain circumstances, and how people have been using it for generations to change the world around them, through the use of Traditional and Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Although I have been told, and seen, the differences between TEK and other ways of fire prevention, I wanted to look into the reasons behind those differences and what would work best for the future.



PIERS PENMAN

When does an acquaintance become a friend?

For the time I've been living I always questioned why having good connections was so important, I never thought it was important cause there's so many of us, why does one person matter. It's a waste of time if it's temporary.

When you think about this, you ask yourself? "When does someone actually become my friend" on a deeper scale, what point do you consider someone your friend? More than just mutual people, is it time?, Connection?, Trust?, Comfortability?.

I question myself because I've always struggled understanding when it happens and why it's selective, I've made deep ones without realizing. If it's not on purpose, at what point does your brain decide? I know it can be different with everyone but some people force this because they under circumstances that they have too. They're around each other enough, or they need someone, so the connection becomes much deeper, more out of necessity than choice. It just happens Then there's the other person. Do they give off certain energy that draws you in?

Some people are easy to open up to. While others stay away no matter how long you've known them. So maybe connections aren't just about proximity, but about alignment. How well two people understand each other. Someone might make you feel what a person couldn't make you feel in years. Another factor to think about is whether it's something you choose or something that just happens to you. You can meet hundreds of people but only a few actually stay in your life.

It's strange because you don't always control who those people are. Sometimes it's the person you least expect it to be. The one you didn't try that hard with or one you didn't try with at all. For me they are the ones that end up understanding you the most. If it's less about effort and more about timing and who you are at that moment. Maybe certain people only become important because they meet you at the right version of yourself, when you're open enough to let them in. Maybe friendship is alignment, and how close someone aligns with you.

TEACHER FEATURE **CLAIRE DAVIES**



Claire grew up with the Columbia River Gorge as her playground. Weekends were spent skiing, mountain biking, trail running, surfing, or kiting, and that love of adventure has never left her, “Being outside and active isn’t just something I enjoy - it’s part of how I approach life.”

Her path to WCA has been anything but typical. Claire studied cell biology and neuroscience with plans for a medical career, but along the way she gathered a wealth of experiences - from teaching in a cadaver lab at Montana State, to ski patrolling, to working as a medical assistant, to commercial fishing. Each role taught her adaptability, patience, and how to read people - skills she now brings to her teaching and coaching. “Days on a fishing boat or patrolling a ski slope can be unpredictable” she explains. “Working with students traveling around the world? It’s the same principle - you need to be flexible, present, and ready for anything.”

Claire joined WCA after meeting a former WCA Kayak team member turned Physician Assistant, who encouraged her to apply. “Kiting has become a way to connect with students,” she says. “Even though the sport can be isolating, I focus on making every session shared, energetic, and fun. There’s nothing better than seeing a student land a trick and cheering them on.”

Her impact goes beyond coaching. In the classroom, Claire teaches environmental science and Spanish, drawing on her global health studies and immersion in Spanish language from a young age.

She creates interactive, culturally rich lessons that encourage students to apply what they learn in real world contexts. “I want students to feel supported, curious, and capable,” she says. “And I hope they see that learning can be exciting and meaningful - whether it’s in a classroom or on the water. Watching that growth is incredibly rewarding.”

Whether on the water or in the classroom, Claire loves creating moments where students surprise themselves. She recalls a day in Tabia, Brazil, when some students set out on a split mission across the lagoon. With music blasting and laughter echoing across the water, Claire watched as even the most hesitant students pushed themselves to try new tricks, encouraging one another along the way. “It wasn’t just about kiting,” she says. “It was about confidence, teamwork, and showing the students that they’re capable of more than they think. Those are the moments I live for”.

For Claire, the goal is simple: be a warm, encouraging presence, celebrate student successes, and model curiosity and joy in everything she does. Her advice for students: “Make everything you do fun, and don’t forget to smile”.







CLIMB ACADEMY & SPAIN
A WCA TRADITION

WORDS BY DREW LEFKOWITH

When climbers think of the most epic destinations, Spain is on nearly every list. Margalef. Siurana. Rodellar. Oliana. And it's home to some of the hardest climbs in the world. Perfecto Mundo. La Rambla. First Round First Minute. Era Vella. La Dura Dura. With multiple world-class destinations around the country, it's no wonder climbers from all over the globe flock to these storied cliffs. This is where climbers cut their teeth.

While sport climbing as we are familiar with it today began in France's Verdon Gorge, Spanish king lines gained in popularity in the early 2000's when American climber Chris Sharma moved to Catalonia and established world-renowned routes. Sharma continues to establish epic lines in these destinations, most recently bolting and completing the first ascent of The Sleeping Lion in Siurana, giving it a grade of 9b+, one of the hardest routes in the world.

Spanish climbers such as Dani Andrada and Daila Ojeda also put Spain on the map. Andrada is a prolific climber and first ascensionist, establishing Chilam Balam (9a+/9b) and known for the climbing battle cry, “A muerte!” Ojeda has climbed up to 8c+ or 14c. Beyond Sharma, Andrada, and Ojeda, Alexander Megos, Adam Ondra, Angie Scarth-Johnson, Jakob Schubert, Margo Hayes, and Michaela Kiersch, among innumerable others, have also made memorable ascents and climbing history in Spain. It was in Siurana on La Rambla that Hayes became the first woman in the world to climb 15a or 9b+. Spain may not have the oldest sport climbing destinations in the world, but it does have one of the highest concentrations of high quality, hard king lines in multiple destinations.





What better place is there to teach climbers how to read rock, project their hardest climbs, and become the best climber they can be?

In the Climbing Academy’s inaugural year, they put Spain as their second destination, basing out of Ulldemolins, a small, quaint town almost equidistant from Siurana and Margalef. Since then, Spain has made TCA’s destination list almost every year. Ulldemolins has become a home away from home and many students visit the county multiple times while attending TCA. They know our hosts by name, where to get the best bread, which days there’s a market in town, and where to get coffee. The school most frequently visits Siurana and Margalef, but has also made multiple excursions to the Santa Linya cave, Chulilla, and Rodellar, and one to Albarracín.

Picture walking to class on the cobblestone streets of a small Catalonian village surrounded by vineyards, wishing the locals, “Bon dia!” one day and then climbing pockets at el Laboratori in Margalef or crimps at Siurana the next alongside Sharma or South Korea’s Chaeyun Seo or Great Britain’s Toby Roberts. For almost 10 years straight, TCA students have gotten to do just that. Spain is the perfect destination for the combination of king lines, culture, exploration, and adventure. Students not only learn on world class rock but also get to explore the streets of Barcelona - Gaudí neighborhoods, flamenco shows - and monasteries in Montsant. They’ve brought the Spanish classroom to life by speaking with locals for daily class assignments. The academy’s visits to Spain embody the mission of World Class Academy: learning about ourselves, others, and the world around us through sport and cultural immersion.

Spain has helped students build technical repertoires; the grips have helped dial in projecting strategy and mindset tactics. The cliffs of Siurana and Margalef, along with the others visited, have allowed students to practice the full array of technical movement, pushing grades into the 8b+ or 5.14 range. While projecting, the Spanish routes have taught students about failure, how to deal with it and bounce back, what to learn from it, and the success that lies within. The climbing areas in Spain bring so many from around the world that students can learn from climbers of all ages, backgrounds, and experiences. It’s an international classroom.





And experiencing the different pace of small town life from the cities students hail from is another learning experience students benefit from for 6 or 7 weeks of each year. How can we slow down and see the beauty in the world? How can we see the common humanity across cultures and continents? Students learn this as they walk the streets of Ulldemolins or Chulilla or Rodellar. And they bring it to the other destinations visited; they bring it to future communities. There are few better places than these hallowed halls.

While TCA won't visit Spain in the upcoming 2026-2027 school year, Spain will always be our home away from home.

Spain allowed us to grow, on and off the rock, as climbers and as people. We now have the tools to explore new summits, new rock types and styles, new cultures and paces of life. Spain set the stage to explore other epic destinations around the globe. When we visit Fontainebleau, Serra do Cipó, Geyikbayiri, the Blue Mountains, Leonidio, Rocklands, we have the tools to clip chains, to learn from locals, to learn from the different cultures around us, all because of what we've learned as a school, as a group, as individual people in this epic destination that feels so much like home. Spain taught us to go "a muerte," and we can't wait to take this epic battle cry to Australia, France, Turkey, and Brazil in the upcoming 2026-2027 school year.

ANABELLE CRUM-GROSS



STUDENT FEATURE

Meet Anabelle, a 16 year old kayak student from Maryland.

Before coming to WCA, Anabelle was already connected to a strong paddling community through a Potomac Area kayaking camp, Calleva. Anabelle now works as a summer instructor at Calleva, coaching young girls to kayak for the first time. Anabelle remembers when she was a camper: “I was always paddling in a group with 10-12 boys and never another girl and that was really difficult for me.” After several years in the Calleva program, Anabelle was introduced to WCA Alum Victoria Levi - her first female paddling partner. Then she attended a racing clinic with Alum Maddie Kimmel and Alum-mom Kara Weld. At the same time that Anabelle finally found a female paddling crew in Maryland, she started hearing about World Class Academy.

Those connections played a major role in her decision to apply, “Being able to know people who attended WCA and seeing how excited they were to talk about it and answer my questions was so helpful,” Anabelle says. “I don’t think I would have found out about (WCA) otherwise.” Just as important, she saw the kind of people they had become. “Knowing they were kind and confident people also made an impact in my decision”. Based on the impression our alumni left, WCA felt like a place where students could grow in their sport while also growing into themselves.

When Anabelle arrived at WCA, she was understandably nervous about stepping into a new environment with students she didn't know. But once again, those same connections helped ease the transition. "Shoutout to Jackie (Kimmel)," she says. "She told me how wonderful and supportive all the faculty were, and that really eased my nerves."

Originally, Anabelle only planned to stay for one semester. That changed quickly. During quarter one in Canada, she decided she wanted to remain for the full year. "I'm so happy I stayed the whole year," she says. Since then, the year has brought standout paddling experiences, especially in Chile. "The kayaking was just so good everywhere we went," she says. "The Puelo Canyon was my favorite river of the year so far."

But some of Anabelle's biggest growth has happened away from the river as well. After quarter one, she bought a camera and began exploring photography. What started as curiosity quickly became a new passion. She especially enjoys shooting photos on the river and capturing moments that teammates can look back on. "It always makes me happy to see how excited people are to see their photos," she says. That new interest in media has become an unexpected part of her WCA experience. Between kayaking, travel, friendships, and creative opportunities, Anabelle has found more than she expected when she first arrived.

Looking ahead, she hopes to continue creating media on and off the water and find ways to carry that passion into life after WCA.









WHAT NEXT?

ON MAY 9TH, THIRTY SENIORS WILL GRADUATE FROM WCA AND MOVE ON TO LIFE'S NEXT ADVENTURE

Kayak	Aiden Alvarez	Electrician Trade School
	Bryce Boerner	Oregon State University
	Dylan Robinson	Lakehead University
	Ethan Fallon	Western Washington
	Hayden McGowan	Western Washington
	Ian Esser	University of Maryland
	Lyra Thevenin	University of Utah
	Noah Arbuckle	Fort Lewis College
	Sol Obregon	Proctor Academy
	Oliver Goodell	Montana State University
Kite	Johannah Pütmann	Copenhagen Business School
	Lynden Bush	University of British Columbia
	Mario Bollmann	University of Cadiz
	Piers Penman	Otago Polytech
Climb	Benjamin Nieder	University of Utah
	Hannah Beatty	Gap Year
	Joryn Higgs	Colorado College
	Liliana Butler	University of Utah
	Myles Brumbach	Gap Year
	Roam Lonsdale	Gap Year
	Roman Sisson	Gap Year
	Rowan Frost	Montana State University
MTB	Grayson Kidder	Cal Poly
	Alex Mueller	
	Andrew Roark	EMT School
	Henry Schafer	Western Washington
	Lola Wais	Capilano University
	Nahuel Vellutino	Business School of Barcelona
	Tiago Giraldo	Gap Year
	Suria Hogue	Colorado Mesa University



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