

# Reporter camps in wilderness, learns cooperation

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The week before Fall classes, while most of my fellow classmates curled up on the couch to watch the "Rosie O'Donnell Show" or decided to catch a few more rays at the beach, I was a guinea pig in a University experiment.

This was the first year of a new orientation program called Orion which the University developed for incoming freshmen.

The brochure I got about this program simply stated that it was a six-day wilderness orientation program that would be physically challenging, but fun.

Two different groups went on Orion and I went on the second of the two trips — with 10 other students and two group leaders. I wasn't a freshman like the others, but I talked my way into going on the trip anyway.

The program, which turned out to be an Outward Bound-type camping expedition, was strenuous, tiring, thought-provoking, life-changing and amazing all at the same time.

We dealt with factors such as not having showers, bathrooms or sinks for a whole week — a difficult thing for most of us to adjust to.

We had to carry everything on

our backs that we would need for the week, which included all our food, tents, sleeping bags, clothes, water and maps.

These packs were extremely heavy and often weighed more than 40 pounds. I practically fell over the first time I tried to stand up with my pack on my back.

We started off our trip from the Penn State Outing Club cabin and jumped into a van that dropped us and our packs off on a trail somewhere in State College.

Immediately we were directed to hike up an extremely steep trail with our packs. The sports asthma I had years ago quickly came back to me.

I could hardly breathe and I quickly fell to the back of the line, tripping over rocks and falling into trees as I tried to stumble uphill with 40 pounds on my back.

The most strenuous part of the trip was the 30 miles of backpacking we did in three days — not including the first day, when we only hiked for one mile.

The hardest was the second day

because we hiked almost 12 miles on extremely rocky and steep terrain. We also saw two rattlesnakes that day, one which we almost tripped over. Literally.

One of the most striking memories of the trip for me was when a few group members decided to eat ants.

This was difficult to comprehend that people hiking on a dirt trail would enjoy just scooping ants up out of the dirt and start eating them, but I realized this was more about group bonding than anything else. And the ant-eaters insisted to us that they tasted like lemons.

When we all ran out of water, we would hike great distances, sometimes up to three miles, to replenish our supply.

I thought they were crazy if they expected us to drink the muddy water from a stream, but our group leaders had water purifiers.

I still thought it was gross to be drinking stream water. Going out of our comfort zone was something our group leaders stressed to us all week.

The day we hiked back to the cabin it poured rain harder than it had the entire trip, and we were all totally exhausted by the time we got back.

Close to the end of the trip, our group went on the rope course,

which consisted of three very physically challenging group and individual activities in which everyone had to participate.

Most of all, on the course and throughout the trip our group learned the importance of communication and teamwork, and we were all amazed how well everyone in the group got along with each other on the trip.

I'm not going to say every one of us is going to hang out with each other at the University, but on this trip everyone got along with each other, which is a rarity in today's day and age.

The trip was fun in the sense that I learned new expressions. At first people left the trail because they said they were going to pick flowers. I was surprised that they didn't come back with a handful full of wildflowers. I soon learned that this expression meant that they had to go to the bathroom.

Besides all the bug bites and scratches on my legs, I got many memories of accomplishment and two credits from the trip.

I will always remember the little things such as when we had to play monopoly at the cabin with no dice, when we all stopped on the trail to eat wild blackberries, and how I learned the importance of teamwork, which held throughout the week.



Collegian Photo/Jodi Hanauer

Some freshmen participate in activities as a part of the Orion Wilderness Orientation Program. Orion was held Aug. 10-15 and 17-22.

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