

The Unexpected Adventure

By: Pam Woods

Attending the American Wilderness Leadership School this past July is what I would call stepping outside my comfort zone. At the age of "50 something", I generally like to keep my life grounded where I am familiar and comfortable. But, I must say attending the AWLS program at Granite Creek Ranch in Jackson, Wyoming was an awesome adventure and opportunity of a life time.

Those of you that have been to Bridger-Teton Mountain Range know that it is very difficult to describe the beauty that beholds them, but I will assure those who have not bestow this opportunity it is simply breathe taking! The air is crisp, the sky is an azure blue, the mountains are phenomenal, Granite Creek rushes past, the wildlife is plentiful and accommodations beyond expectations. What a place to attend school!

We started our time with acknowledging the programs goals and objectives along with understanding the sponsors of SCI that make AWLS available to educators across the country. We then moved on to a name game that was much more fun than it sounds. Not realizing the bonds and friendships that would develop over a course of a week between comrades.

Over the course of the stay we held classes inside and outside of the classroom. The subject areas included such topics as wildlife ecology, wildlife conservation, outdoor survival, stream ecology, resource management, hunting responsibility and ethics, human impact on resources and ecology and biology. At the ranch, we experienced a "hands-on" approach with instructions on firearms which included skills, knowledge, and safety of handguns, rifle, and shotgun. Over several days of training with the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) we earned our certification to be Basic Archery Instruction. We participated in several Project Wild and E.I.E.I.O. activities that would be fun and exciting to include in our classroom curriculum. Another enjoyable activity was the art of making flies for fly fishing. Many of us became quite skilled -so Cabellas and Orvis look out- we may be your next competition!

Not only were we at Granite Creek Ranch for instruction, but we went on several field trips to understand the effects of human impact on our environment. Our travels took us to the Bureau of Land Management in Pinedale, Wyoming to development an understanding of the impact that humans impose on wildlife was fascinating. The staff from the Wyoming Game and Fish and BLM archeologists and range specialist spoke of the pros and cons of the environmental and human impact on this area. This trip was a practically interesting experience for me personally because of the Marcel gas drilling that is currently taking place in Pennsylvania.

We spent a great afternoon at the National Elk Refuge and visited the beautiful Grand Teton Visitor Center. Along the way we cautiously observed a herd of bison. Then we went on to a delightful evening in the exciting town of Jackson to enjoy dinner and shopping.

When you think the excitement is about to end I realize how wrong I was! The final day was a stimulating raft ride on the Snake River (which I viewed from an observation point), followed by a tantalizing cook out at the ranch, and then on to the Tomahawk Throw Competition. I really don't know how AWLS could possibly squeeze any more activities in to a week's time!

I can hardly wait to get back in my classroom and share with my students the knowledge and skill that were developed throughout my adventure at AWLS! My plan is to develop an education program that will help students become environmentally responsible. So thank you, to those that support the Western Ohio-Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of SCI to make it possible to send educators like me (who can't shut up about it!) on a wonderful and exciting experience.