

This year I was accepted to participate in the 2018 Alcoa Naturebridge scholarship which took me to Olympic National Park in Washington State USA, and introduced me to life changing experiences of which I'll never forget. Along with fellow students from my area we first met the rest of the West Australians that we'd travel with. At first people were hesitant and nervous to be stuck with strangers for the thirteen hour flight and numerous smaller flights necessary to get to Washington, but we quickly bonded and got to know each other and soon we'd all become good friends.

Although our destination was altered from Yosemite to the Olympic national park the expert organisers kept everyone informed and up to date with what was happening. In fact I'm very impressed with how everything was handled on the trip from health and safety precautions to general trust and respect shown to us scholars by educators and organisers. On the trip the scholars were not treated as children, we were allowed to explore and travel in airports and at the basecamp as long as we kept to schedule and within reason which was something I really appreciated as often on trips like these through schools or other educational activities, strict rules are placed on those participating which can feel overly 'hand-holdy' and unnecessary. As a result I felt a great sense of independence, especially in traveling to America from Australia where we had no supervisors and relied on each other to traverse the airports where many of us had little experience. This was really refreshing and enjoyable and we were given enough instruction via email to always know where and when we had to be places so there was little stress involved.

I can honestly say that being a part of this trip was one of, if not the most amazing experience of my life and its incredibly hard to narrow down just what made it so memorable. In large I think I can say that all the new faces and beautiful personalities I met along the trip, their funny accents and interesting slang, made every moment one to cherish and ever since the impossibly sad task of saying goodbye, I have not stopped missing every single friend I made on this trip, educators and scholars alike. Getting to know everyone from different cultures and backgrounds was amazing and has encouraged me to see those parts of the world. Another highlight of course would have to be the backpacking portion of the trip where for seven days I didn't have to worry about what I looked like or how I smelt and how dirty I was (hint, very). For that week my whole mindset was altered and I found new challenged to think about that I would not find at home. Things like what and how to cook meals with the food I had remaining and resources I had available, where we'd get our water from and how I packed my bag in preparation for the day. A lot more effort had to be put into ensuring we were ready for the day and it was really interesting to have to face these different challenges. one final highlight of the trip were the many team and friendship building activities that we did throughout the trip. These activities were often initiated by educators where we played games where we had to work together to achieve a goal or to get something done. Other times as a group the Scholars played sports and taught each other games from their own countries. These activities were really great bonding experiences and I really value them for allowing me to get to know and spend time with all the amazing people I met on that trip. I especially enjoyed sleeping out underneath the stars (despite the overcast sky) on the final night of the hike and I felt like it brought us all a lot closer together as a team and even as a family.

It was a lot of the little things on this trip that meant a lot to me and really made it special and in that aspect it was very valuable to me. things like the beauty of the northern hemispheres' stars at

night that I got to admire on the first night of the hike while everyone else had gone to sleep, or the amazing animals like the many deer or bears we had the luck to see. In a more educational sense the trip was massively valuable to me in teaching me many lessons about the world and specifically the natural environment. I learnt a lot about how the natural world functions and what effect human impact is having on the environment with it being very present should you know where to look. I learnt a lot about how difficult survival is in the wilderness and that you need to be very prepared, far beyond what it seems. Overall the experience taught me to appreciate the environment while I'm physically able and while it's still there to be experienced.

Coming home from this trip I have become far more aware of what waste I produce every day and I've been making conscious acts to reduce things like plastic litter and unnecessary use of one time use only cutlery, straws and other items that can be hazardous or produce micro-plastics. In the future I want to make even more efforts to drastically reduce the waste produced by my household or even remove it completely if possible. I want to make the issue of climate change and of litter and pollution more known and understood by people I know to make a positive impact in my local area. A very important lesson about what food is good to eat I am sure to take with me for a long time, a week of eating food dropped on the floor and infused with grass and 'bush pepper' has had a profound impact on my standard of what 'clean' is, at least I'm reducing food waste. Finally this trip has encouraged and inspired me to teach my own future children the lessons I was taught over this trip and to have similar adventures like this of my own in the hopefully not too far future.

This trip was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity for me. I doubt I'll ever have the chance again to experience the wilderness alongside the variety of amazing people from all over the world as I have on this trip and I am forever grateful to everyone that made it possible. So to everyone who helped organise, run and prepare for the trip I'd like to give a big thank you, and to my fellow scholars I will never forget the amazing time we all spent together, however short it was. Anyone considering applying for this or any trip like it I would highly recommend it, you'll never get the chance to do anything like it again and if I had the chance I would do it a million times over.

-Daniel Iversen, Western Australia