

The Lowell Whiteman School's Orientation Trips Filled with Bonding and Adventure

At the start of each school year, students and faculty at The Lowell Whiteman School in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, head off into the pristine wilderness of Colorado for Orientation Camp Trips of three or four nights. The school's founder, Lowell Whiteman, believed that experiences in the outdoors were essential to a young person's education, and to this day the school upholds this part of Whiteman's vision, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to learn camping skills, sleep under the stars, and push him or herself out of their comfort zones.

This year, the students went on trips by class level, a departure from the mixed-class trips in previous years. As part of their leadership training, all the seniors and two faculty members drove to the east side of the Zirkel Wilderness, and did a three-night through-hike before joining the younger students at the Seedhouse Group Campsite on the western edge of the Zirkels. Trip leaders Brian Smith and Nikki Durkan couldn't have been happier with how the seniors handled the dozens of miles of hiking, the discussions about school leadership and their role in helping run the school, and how they engaged the younger students during the last night of the trip. "They were awesome," says Smith, a LWS faculty member for 13 years. "They handled everything well, got along with each other, and have set a great tone for the year." Brian Alsberg, a four-year senior from Chicago, sums up, "It was a blast!"

The juniors did the reverse trip of the seniors, starting on the western side of the Zirkels and ending up at Lake Dumont near the Continental Divide. Trip leaders Gina Wither and John Morse were equally excited about how well the juniors, the largest class in the school with 20 students, handled the challenges of four nights in the wilderness. Upon arriving at their last campsite, they had a burrito feast waiting for them, courtesy of faculty members Meg Morse and Margi Missling-Root.

The freshman and sophomores established a base camp at the Seedhouse Group Site, and spent three days learning the basics about being in the outdoors, rock climbing, Leave No Trace, and other outdoor and camping ethics. Led by faculty members Jim Linville, Erin Davis, Randy Judycki, and Brittany Pack, the students put their educations to work by having a day of rock climbing and then a day of hiking into the depth of the Zirkels. Judycki, the school's new Dean of Students and Director of Outdoor Programs, created this trip to allow students to have a combination of learning and adventure. "Being on the rocks, especially," says Judycki, a certified rock climbing guide, "is such a great way to build trust in each other, something young students can struggle with. It's you trusting



From top: Sophomores Olivia, Avital, and Lizzy before their hiking trip; Seniors take a rest on the trail deep in the Zirkels; Freshmen and sophomores on a snow field above Gilpin Lake.

your partner, trusting yourself. From learning how to tie knots to being accountable to your climbing partner, climbing teaches a huge amount of skills.”

The school offers two more camping opportunities during the fall: an optional skills trip in September, where students can focus on a single activity such as mountain biking, kayaking, or rock climbing, and then the school’s famed Desert Week in October. Here, students and faculty head for the canyons, rivers, and mountains of Western Colorado and Eastern Utah for a week of adventure.

The Lowell Whiteman School is an independent, college-preparatory secondary boarding and day school in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, offering a curriculum of rigorous academics, global studies, competitive snow sports, and outdoor experiences. LWS is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and accredited by the Association of Colorado Independent Schools (ACIS). Founded in 1957 by Steamboat pioneer Lowell Whiteman, today the co-educational school draws students locally, nationally and internationally to its campus. For more information, visit lws.edu or call 970.879.1350.



From top: Dylan, Rhett, and Josh practice clean kitchen techniques at the Seedhouse Group Site; Sophomore Brian takes a second between moves during one of his climbs.