

Range Camp Rocks

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This summer I vaccinated a sheep. With help, of course.



I learned to do that, among other things, at the 26th annual California-Pacific Range and Natural Resources Camp. I attended camp from June 20 to June 25 with Hercules High School senior Nicole Ng, and other students from all over California. Founded by Mike Stroud in 1985, Cal-Pac Range Camp is an annual environmental science camp held on the beautiful Elkus Ranch in Half Moon Bay.

Ng and I were among the few campers who had absolutely no experience working with livestock and ranches. Herculean culture is entirely different; I doubt many people know what FFA is and we do not have a farm. I am embarrassed to admit, but before camp, I thought everything related to hardcore agriculture and livestock was for Texans and Montanans. Somewhere in my head, I obviously knew California is a big farming state, but I just never thought there would be a camp that taught about livestock so close to home. Needless to say, the experience was an eye-opener.

At camp, we were constantly busy. Never in my life had I felt so accomplished when the day was over as I did during those four days. Every single minute was well spent, whether I was learning how to tell the difference between yarrow and poison hemlock, searching for fly larvae underneath the rocks in Purisima creek or talking about boys with a couple of buddies while walking across camp to take a shower. We even spent half a day in bright yellow hard hats, walking around Purisima Creek Redwood Forest with a forester who showed us how he decides what trees to cut, and why.

By the end of the first day, I was falling in love with range camp and everything I never knew California possessed.

The world that had previously seemed to me full of ubiquitous settling and compromising had something tangible to offer me: real examples of people simply unable to contain their passion.

The camp coordinator Marc Horney, the botanists, soil scientists, fire ecologists, entomology connoisseurs- every single one of our instructors and advisors were obviously in love with what they did. Their bubbling excitement was intoxicating, as was the magical environment they had chosen to use as their classrooms, because really, velvet grass makes such an impression.

I felt so complete when the sun was disappearing behind the hills. Several times, I wanted to cry because camp made it seem like there was a reason for everything. Since then, I have believed in the goodness of people again. Or rather, I believe in my own strength; it was as if camp made me realize that I can make a difference. Suddenly, beating global warming and climate change seemed possible. After all, there were people out there running camps about environmental science.

The night before our last day at camp, I knew that I would soon mentally go over every memory and physically touch every plant I could get my hands on, in a crude attempt to hold on to Range Camp. The next day, when I actually left Elkus Ranch, and my family drove away with me on the freeway, I

felt traumatized, as if my senses were not yet adjusted to the loudness, the hardness and the greyness of the world. For the next few days, I felt lost in suburbia. I was lost in the uniformity and the cleanliness. Over the course of the summer, I would dream about Range Camp for a total of seven times.

Later, walking around Hercules, I actually found flowers and grasses that I could identify. I realized that there is no reason to be sad because I had taken so much from Range Camp. So thank you, Kent Reeves and the Yolo County Resource Conservation District for sponsoring me, and thank you both Michael Hudson and Nicole Ng for introducing me to Range Camp.

Range Camp has enlightened me. It has changed me. It has permanently made me a “happy camper.”