

# Getting Wild

## in the Great Outdoors



Story by Keith Crawford and Daniel Lovik  
Photos by Jason Halley



**B**listers, bear sightings, and burnt meals—as Wildcat Wilderness Orientation (WWO) finished its second year of community building and giving students a look into college life, staff and students realized the many outdoor challenges they encountered were perfect metaphors for the difficult situations freshmen and transfer students face during their years at Chico State and beyond.

What better way to befriend strangers, seize an opportunity to try new things or find peace outside your comfort zone?

WWO offers first-year and transfer students an opportunity to attend multiple-day outdoor excursions as a secondary college orientation through the Associated Students' Adventure Outings—a student-led organization that hosts year-round outdoor trips. Its proven curriculum is based on extensive research linking outdoor orientation programs with positive student outcomes and an easier transition into college.

“Before I went on WWO, college was this scary place. At actual orientation, I was terrified,” said Kim Bertrand, a communication design major. “Afterward, I came back and said, ‘I can’t wait to go to school here.’ ... Six months later, I felt like I had been in college for years and this was now home.”

A native of Southern California, Bertrand didn’t know any other students before orientation and saw the 2014 Sacramento River canoe and camping trip as a chance to meet new people.

It was the perfect introduction to college life, she said. The adventure pushed Bertrand to cook her own dinner, lug a 50-pound canoe on sunburned shoulders for a mile to reach camp, and sleep out on her own.

“It just got me emotionally ready and feeling more excited that I had friends and a job to come to,” Bertrand said. “I had more than just an education to look forward to.”

The outdoor orientation program formerly known as Chico Bound was revamped and relaunched as Wildcat Wilderness Orientation in summer 2014 and continued improving in 2015. The new name better reflects the program’s goal of orienting incoming students toward a healthy college lifestyle, while introducing them to the great outdoors of Northern California.

Challenging students to work through their trials in small groups, the program teaches life skills such as teamwork, time management, leadership, social competence, responsibility, and flexibility. Most importantly, facing these obstacles as a team creates strong bonds that last well after they return home from their adventure.

The summer 2015 trips featured a four-day sea kayaking trip on Tomales Bay, a four-day backpacking trip to Cinder Cone volcano in Lassen Volcanic National Park, a five-day backpacking trip in Yosemite National Park, and a five-day backpacking trip through the

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—Kim Bertrand, Communication Design

Trinity Alps wilderness.

Participating students live outside, eat outside, and sleep outside. They get to better know themselves, each other, and nature, all while gaining insight and tips on living a successful, balanced college lifestyle.

“The trip leaders were there to answer any questions we had about college,” said Raymond Santana, who attended the Yosemite trip in July. “It relieved some of the anxiety I had. Otherwise I would have been coming into Chico State blind.”

A longtime Boy Scout and prospective marketing major, he was unable to attend traditional orientation and hoped this experience would introduce him to new people. He was surprised by the trip’s intimacy—a campus trait he’s since come to know and embrace.

“Having small personal interaction was

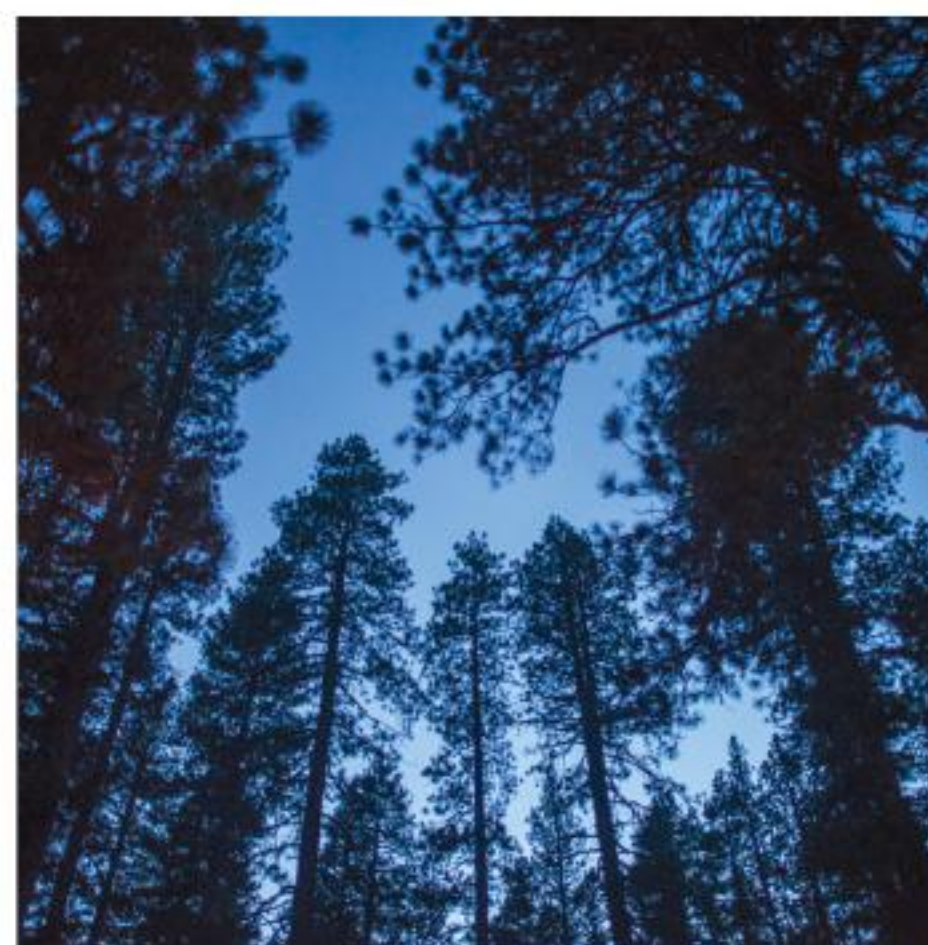
foreshadowing coming to Chico and the one-on-one experience I have had in classes and clubs, and the friendliness and openness that Chico has,” he said.

In total, 29 freshmen and 14 transfer students participated in WWO in 2015—up 54 percent from the prior year. Ten of those students received scholarships through the Get Outdoors Fund, which Adventure Outings operates to provide financial assistance for students who otherwise may not be able to afford its outdoor trips.

Each trip contains team-building activities and games that bring the students together in a way only possible in the outdoors, pushing them to find solutions without the resources they are used to. All trips conclude with a “solo experience,” a period of self-reflection where students formulate written goals for the next six months and beyond. Trip leaders



Team-building activities and games bring students together.



Alyssa Cox, Brooke Tillery, and Claire Amaral (left to right) share stories around the campfire during their backpacking excursion to Lassen Volcanic National Park.



return the goals to participants the following semester so students can realize their progress.

"It was something I had never done before—consider why I was going to Chico State and what I wanted to do," Santana said. "One of the goals I set was to try to put myself out there and look into as many groups and organizations as I could to find my niche."

Bertrand certainly found hers. Not only did the four-day adventure prepare her for college, but it pointed her to a job at Adventure Outings where she now staffs the office's front counter and advises other students on trips.

"I met all my best friends there and we all live together now," she said. "The trip was the start of my Chico career and life, so I'm really grateful for it."

As Adventure Outings plans for 2016, staff members are excited to grow and improve the program.

Over the next few summers, WWO will create a curriculum specific to transfer students, establish new activities and more multi-sport trips, offer longer trips, and explore ways to integrate service components. For more information, visit [www.aschico.com/wwo](http://www.aschico.com/wwo).

#### About the authors

*Keith Crawford is the assistant coordinator of Adventure Outings at CSU, Chico. Daniel Lovik is the former student manager of WWO.*



Name: **Mackenzie Keith**  
Hometown: **Santa Rosa**  
Major: **Business Administration**

**Trip highlight:** My favorite part of the trip was the sunrise hike we did on the last day. We woke up at 3 a.m. and hiked up a super steep, sandy volcano. The beautiful views and watching the sunrise from the top of the volcano were priceless and made the hike so worth it.

**How did WWO prepare you for college?** WWO introduced me to people who had similar interests as me, which made it easy for us to become friends on the trip and at Chico State. It also helped me realize that college is a great time to have lots of interests and to try new things.



Name: **Johanna Kittel**  
Hometown: **Napa**  
Major: **Biology**

**Trip highlight:** The final hike up Cinder Cone. Although it was difficult, it really brought all of us together and the view was amazing. It was the perfect ending to the perfect trip.

**How did WWO prepare you for college?** The leaders talked to us about real-life situations in college and helped us overcome some of the fears we might have. It also helped me prepare for college because they taught us about time management and healthy living.



Name: **Brooke Tillery**  
Hometown: **Sacramento**  
Major: **Communication Design**

**Trip highlight:** My favorite part of the trip was watching the sunrise on the last day. It was so pretty!

**How did WWO prepare you for college?** The leaders went over what life was like in Chico and tips for being successful. It also made me more motivated to get involved. Additionally, I was able to start my year with friends, which I think is one of the reasons I'm loving it here!





Chico State students explore Subway Cave during a five-day backpacking excursion to Cinder Cone in Lassen Volcanic National Park.

# OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES ADD UP

Everyone knows Wildcats love adventure. They proved that once again this year when they ranked in the top 10 in the Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge, sponsored by REI and The North Face. With the help of the Associated Students and Adventure Outings, Chico State was one of 57 schools in 31 states tackling the Outdoor Nation Campus Challenge in 2015.

The competition launched in September with the goal to get people outside and

active—be it biking, bird-watching, or any other al fresco experience. The competition concluded October 17. Any and all kinds of outdoor activities qualified for activity points, as long as participants were engaging with the outdoors for 30 minutes or more.

“I’m very proud of how we did, especially considering this was our first year competing,” said Keith Crawford, assistant coordinator of Adventure Outings. “The students, staff, and faculty that made it possible for us to

be named one of the top 10 most outdoorsy schools in the nation should all be very proud of their efforts.”

Chico State has an esteemed history of supporting outdoor activities, from offering classes such as backpacking and scuba diving, competitive sports clubs such as waterskiing and field hockey, and wilderness experiences through Adventure Outings and WWO. 🌲

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**CHICO STATE** **7TH** **NEARLY 2,000 ACTIVITIES**  
**RANKED**  
**25,030** **ACTIVITY POINTS** **555 PARTICIPANTS**  
**LOGGED** **6 WEEKS**

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