

“My Pisgah Experience led me to Alaska on an Earthwatch Expedition.”

Ask a group of teenagers: “How would you like to spend part of your summer vacation living in a tent with no TV, going days without a shower, surrounded by mounds of bird poo?” You can imagine the reaction. But five students from Pisgah jumped at the chance to do just that on an incredible Earthwatch expedition to Alaska.

The terrain was rugged and the weather was often cold and miserable, but the students felt the harsh conditions only added to the adventure. “Being away from the hustle and bustle of life is one of the better aspects of the trip,” says 17-year-old **Max King**. “What can I say? Birds, bears, baby chicks, glaciers, and chilly mornings....life is good.”

The students, along with their Pisgah biology teacher, spent two weeks studying the seabirds of Prince William Sound. Monitoring the health of wildlife in this area is particularly important because the ecosystem was threatened by the Exxon-Valdez spill.

The students filed regular reports on their website blog: “I feel like I’m in National Geographic magazine, said 18-year-old **Poncho Doucette**. “I have not showered in like eight days but it is so worth it!” The kids were awestruck by the natural beauty of God’s creation: Alaska’s glaciers, mountains, and wildlife. “This was one of the coolest experiences that I have ever had,” said 17-year-old **David Brumley**. “I will always remember swimming and bathing next to a 10,000-year-old glacier and seeing giant chunks break off of it.”

The team focused on one specific seabird: the black-legged kittiwake. Working from inflatable boats with US Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, the students became real-life researchers. 16-year-old **Leah Puffenberger** plans to study animal science in college and loved the hands-on experience. “Being able to handle a baby kittiwake, measure it, study it, and release it back in to the wild gave me the feeling of being a real biologist. I feel very fortunate that my high school offered this experience for us.”

In fulfilling the mission to be the first choice for Christian schooling, Pisgah is committed to providing a wide range of educational experiences for students. “Academic trips like this one build understanding of our responsibilities for ecological stewardship and our need to be good global citizens”, explains Upper School Principal **Bill Shelnett**. “They are an important part of the Pisgah Experience that we share with our students.”

Hours of video and loads of photos will allow the teens to preserve their memories of the trip for many years to come. Some of their fondest memories spring from some unlikely events. “I have seen some things that I never thought I’d have the chance to see,” says 17-year-old **Ali Chouhdry**. “A bald eagle tearing the heads off of baby kittiwake chicks, gulls dive bombing us on top of the colony and pooping all over us, and glaciers breaking off into the bay. I hope everyone reading this has the same opportunity to experience nature at its best!”

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