



PROJECT ASCENT

ADVENTURE. SCIENCE. COMMUNITY. EDUCATION. NATURE. TEAMWORK.

Quarterly
Newsletter

issue no. 3

September 2023

CONNECTING. PEOPLE. AND NATURE.

Words from behind the scenes

Wow, September already. I am embarrassed to admit I have about 17 “pending tasks” in my calendar alarming me each day that I need to complete this newsletter and keep all you wonderful folks updated on our happenings...dating all the way back to July. What I and our team find is that summer disappears oh so quickly, and so many things become “priorities” that the word soon becomes null. This summer we successfully hosted our 5th annual Cornhole Festival Fundraiser, three amazing Adventures for 30 kids, hosted a brand new private fundraiser as a “Thank you” to a lot of our frequent supporters, wrote multiple grants, and did our best to sneak in a little time for ourselves and our families. So the delay, while unfortunate, happens all too easy. You can imagine my relief now that I have hit that “send” button and can mark my newsletter tasks as done. I will take a moment to relax, and imagine you perusing the wonderful articles in this newsletter, written by outstanding team members, before ramping up for the next big thing. I hope you enjoy getting a few updates and maybe even seeing your name on our donors page! Thank you for supporting what we do, for being human, and allowing us to be human, too, on this great Adventure of life!

-ANDREA CHRISTENSEN

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A Special Thank You

At the end of this summer, we received an extremely generous donation from Lauri Warfeild of Chagrin Falls, Ohio, and would like to extend a huge front page THANK YOU for her generosity and support! We also hosted a brand new event that you will hear more about in our next issue, and would like to thank Jenna Brown and her family for all their generosity and hard work pulling it off!

THE IMMERSION EXPERIENCE

BY SARAH BUSHMIRE, WATERSHED COORDINATOR AND INSTRUCTOR



Project ASCENT is such an incredible organization that not only allows children to experience the outdoors, go on amazing adventures and build confidence, it also teaches our next generation about natural resources and the importance of protecting them. They expose children to future career opportunities in the natural resource field and allow them to engage with natural resource professionals to learn, ask questions and explore. When I show up to the Project ASCENT campsite, I can tell that the kids are engaging with each other and the natural world around them, which is so hard these days in a world full of screens and endless entertainment at our fingertips. Project ASCENT allows these kids to just be kids in a safe, natural and confidence-building environment.

Working for the Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group as the Watershed Coordinator, I am afforded incredible opportunities to share my love of the outdoors and all things nature on a daily basis. One of these amazing opportunities that I look forward to every summer is getting to lead a hike around Fishtrap Lake where I chat with the Project ASCENT campers about plants, ecology, wildlife and instill in them a new found curiosity of the natural world. This year's trip all started with an early drive out of Trout Creek into Thompson Falls to head up the Thompson River. The drive to Fishtrap Lake is nearly 2 hours on dirt roads, so myself and my Big Sky Watershed Corp member stocked up on snacks and coffee and started the trek into the backcountry. On the drive up to camp we saw 4 moose, numerous deer, and other wildlife which gave me an inkling for the incredible day ahead of us. Upon arrival to camp the kids were playing games, hanging around the campfire, and chatting about their plans for the day. A few of the campers cooked up a breakfast over a propane stove for the entire group, and they worked together to get all of the supplies out for a proper breakfast burrito. The kids eat good at camp (yes, I had a burrito as well!), they learn cooking skills and how to work together to accomplish a task. Once the kids had eaten and packed their backpacks for the day, we introduced ourselves and discussed what the watershed group does, then we headed out on our hike!

The total length of the hike at Fishtrap Lake is 3.25 miles, which consists of time spent at both Fishtrap Lake and Upper Fishtrap Lake and portions through heavily wooded areas. Having done this hike in the Summer of 2022 with Project ASCENT, I was familiar with the trail, what plants to expect and how long it would take us, so I led the way. It wasn't too long into our hike, we found gold (well purple gold)! The Huckleberry bushes were fully loaded with ripe Huckleberries, prime for the picking! Of course, being a lover of the purple berries myself, I immediately stopped and created excitement in the group of what we had just found. Along our hike, we stopped about every 5 minutes to pick more Huckleberries, and I got to share with the kids the importance of the berries to wildlife, pollinators and other plants. Many of the kids filled their water bottles to make a sort of Huckleberry juice, picked till their hands were purple and got to experience one of the best natural snacks that Montana has to offer! We also picked wild strawberries, wild onions and Thimbleberries. The kids not only got to learn about plant identification, ecology and how important our role is in the protection of our natural resources, they had a hands on experience with wild Montana. We then saw an Osprey nest, a Mule Deer fawn and tons of beautiful native plants and trees. We concluded our hike by engaging in conversation with the campers about the hike, what they learned and encouraged any questions they had.



The Lower Clark Fork Watershed Group was only at camp for one day, but I can only imagine the experiences these kids have throughout the week, between daily adventures, fresh campfire food and connecting with each other and nature. Project ASCENT is such an asset to the kids of Montana, especially since it is at no cost to the parents. Kids are the future of our world, and encouraging their curiosity and confidence through nature is a great way to plant the seeds of stewardship for a future generation.



Training to Climb

BY JOHN DOWD, BOARD MEMBER AND FIELD INSTRUCTOR

Climbing is one of those sports that takes all of a person to become good at. There is no single movement to practice over and over again that translates into success. Unlike many other sports, there are thousands of movements and muscles to train that all translate into better climbing performance. When I got into climbing, I was in fantastic shape, but had no idea the road that lay ahead of me, and all the training I would need just to become ok. Not great, but ok. There is not really anything else that prepares a person for being in climbing shape. Everyone starts at the bottom of the wall. Along the way, I have found a few things that helped get there. Training for these things can significantly improve a person's ability to climb well.

The first, and most important two of these, are basic arm and finger strength. I knew where my roadblocks were and, early in my climbing journey, most of the time they came down to basic lack of arm strength. I started doing dozens of pull-ups a day, and got to the point where I could do up to 30 in any sitting, up to six or seven times a day. That helped huge when I started.

The next part of that first mention is finger strength. Probably the biggest wall for most climbers to break through is the finger strength hurdle. Most normal activities in our lives do not require much in the way of finger strength. Even mechanics, woodworkers and others who work with their hands, even daily, are hard pressed to find they are already equipped with the supreme level of hand strength required in climbing. Hanging one's body off of only a few fingers, then pulling one's self up, swinging or even throwing one's self are all situations a person may find themselves in. Along with the challenge, and need for it, finger strength is also hard to train. The a good way to train is to get hand-squeezing workout tools, but the best is to hang from one's fingers. Using strong door frames, specialized climbing hang-boards, or even flat topped pull up bars, or posts, can help get there faster. Progressing from simple hangs, working down to one hand or only a few fingers is a good start. From there, working to have the same hold, but to do pull-ups on those grips is really the best way to train fingers for climbing.



Training to Climb

BY JOHN DOWD, BOARD MEMBER AND FIELD INSTRUCTOR



After arms and fingers, I have found another plateau has been legs, believe it or not. Learning to position and use legs effectively while climbing can be a huge challenge. We are four limbed beings, and if a person were to watch monkeys climb, it would become obvious that they use their back legs as much, or more so, than their front limbs. Doing squats can help, but really, leg strength is often most challenged when a person needs to do a single leg stand on a tiny hold. Using the climbing wall, finding progressively smaller holds and performing a single leg squat and raise in multiple positions can help train this particular movement.

Unlike a pitcher in baseball, a climber cannot rely on the same movement, as no two climbs are the same. Where a swimmer only needs to swim to practically train, or the basketball player may need to free throw and work through game plans, a climber needs to do everything from running, to strength training and from stretching to mentally working through a climb. However, like most other sports, the best training for climbing comes down to spending a lot of time on the wall.

Check out this section each quarter for some climbing, belaying, and rappelling tips from our amazing experts here at Project ASCENT.

FROM EXPLORER TO INSTRUCTOR

BY KAELE BROWN, JUNIOR FIELD INSTRUCTOR

This was my second year working for Project ASCENT as a junior field instructor. I've been going to camps since I was young and I've been working for them as soon as I heard about the position. My favorite part of these camps has always been bonding with the people there regardless of background. From my first year as a camper, I always thought we found a lucky group who just so happened to click but I've been to so many camps now it's hard to think that anymore. Something about these camps always seems to bring people together and it's what I look forward to most on these trips.

That aside, the experiences and activities are stellar as well. Each camp provides such a unique experience, all of which are a blast to be a part of. You can tell so much thought was put into these camps to provide the best experience possible.

I love seeing the progress Project ASCENT has made over the years. It's always striving to do more and be better. I'm happy we had another great year and I look forward to seeing what the future holds.



Looking Behind

Let's review our 2nd quarter!

Another Cornhole Fundraiser “in the bag”

The 5th Annual Cornhole Festival Fundraiser and Silent Auction was another remarkable success. We saw over 80 participants overall in the auction, tournament, and after party. This year we had over 50 items available to bid on and the Clark Fork Valley Elks Lodge graciously hosted our auction for two weeks prior to the Cornhole Festival. All of our auction items took a short trip and spent the day basking in the glory of competition from 20 different teams who came out to play. We had perfect weather, and even better people. While this year wasn't our busiest of all fundraisers, it was marked by many of our team members as the favorite, it went smoothly, and we had so much more time to connect with the folks who came out to support us. That's really a big part of why we do this, not only so we can continue to send kids on once in a lifetime Adventures, but also to connect with our community and beyond. We gained some new supporters, saw some familiar faces, ate some delicious BBQ from Bitchn Ktchn BBQ, danced the night away with DJ Ray Brown after the tournament, and left our ever marvelous and accommodating hosts with a clean slate the next day. This is an event we continue to be proud of, and one that is ever crucial to our fundraising efforts each year. This year we saw an incredible increase in support, with sponsorships almost doubling! A huge thanks to everyone who donated, participated, bid, and volunteered, we were able to raise funding to support an entire Adventure and more! Our only complaint is that we didn't get to see our dear Washington and Idaho supporters, but we are holding out for next year!



2023 Summer Adventure Series Recap

BY ROB CHRISTENSEN, CEO AND SUMMER ADVENTURE COORDINATOR

We were blessed with three AMAZING adventures this year! We began with our Base Camp Adventure on the Bull River, then followed with our West Fork/Fishtrap Adventure, and ended with an epic forty mile kayak trip down the Flathead River on our Pack and Paddle Adventure. We had full sign-ups this year, with participants from all over our great state, and even an exchange student from Paris, France! Lessons included bear safety, water safety, flora and fauna identification, Leave No Trace Principles, old growth forest and riparian ecology, watersheds and wildlife corridors, bird watching and importance, entomology and life cycles, tree identification and aging, history of our native peoples, David Thompson and his influence on the areas we explored, history of the buffalo range, importance of trapping in the development of our area, along with medicinal and edible plants, sustainable food and energy, and local forestry and wilderness job opportunities. I'm sure I forgot a few, but you get the idea, and I'm running out of room. The explorers were eager, the professionals were passionate, and the adventures were all, once again, epic! I find myself each year more and more grateful for the volunteers we have working with us who make these experiences above and beyond any expected level I could have imagined while planning them. What I love about forestry and wilderness professionals is their undying energy and passion for what they know, teach, and get to do on a daily basis. It's one of those "if you know, you know" type fields of work. This energy is contagious, and the kids feel and emulate it. Makes for an incredibly fun learning journey! Although exhausted, I found myself ironically rejuvenated after our expeditions this summer. The learning, experiences, and content was phenomenal.

I love everything about what we get to do.

I've been having a blast going through pictures, reminiscing with our friends who don't get the opportunity to experience it first-hand, and building excitement for next year. I hope these experiences do for our youth what they do for me. Actually, I have no doubt they do. In fact, that's what truly fuels me. Stay tuned for more pics of our epic Summer Adventure Series on our website gallery coming very soon!!





Looking Ahead

Check out our up and coming events, funding status, and Adventures!

We have funded 1 Summer Adventure in 2024!

Grant writing, Giving Tuesday, and Generosity

While our Summer Adventure series is wrapping up for the year, our busy work begins! Our team is already ramping up for our next season, setting dates for our next community events, fundraisers, and looking at we can improve. We have written multiple grants for next years Adventures, and are always seeking new opportunities to help reach more kids! We will be participating in this year's Giving Tuesday on November 28th with an online drive you can find on our Facebook or website, and we are always accepting donations with open hearts and grateful minds!

HERE'S TO YOU, THANK YOU



WE'D LIKE TO THANK ALL OF OUR RECENT DONORS, THEIR GENEROSITY IS WHAT
FUELS OUR MISSION! GIVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT MAKING A DONATION, ITS ABOUT
MAKING A DIFFERENCE.



- Brita Olson
- Patricia Pyle
- Wendy and Mike Kelly
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- Ruth Cheney
- Jodi and Shawn Morgan
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Do you want to see your name in the next issue? Help us provide
a once-in-a-lifetime Adventure! Follow the link below to donate!



TALK TO US

Questions, comments, concerns, congratulations? We would love to hear from you! Visit our website, shoot us a text or email, call us, write us, or follow us on Facebook for more information and updates!

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"Restore balance. Most kids have technology, school and extracurricular activities covered. It's time to add a pinch of adventure, a sprinkle of sunshine and a big handful of outdoor play."

~ Penny Whitehouse