

Kids' Confidence Peaks on Mt. Whitney

By Doug Imberi, DDJC Public Affairs

This summer Rob Sealey, a DDJC investigator, spent part of his vacation in community service with a group of youngsters atop the highest point in the continental U.S., Mt. Whitney. The peak is located halfway between Stockton and Los Angeles in the Sierra Nevada mountain range. At the 14,497 feet elevation he could see Death Valley, 90 miles away.

"It was spectacular," said Sealey. "You could see from the highest point to the lowest point in the U.S."

The group started at the 8,000 feet elevation, covering 20 miles of trail in three days. It was all high country backpacking, not mountain climbing. "If I have to reach over my head," said Sealey. "I won't do it."

Sealey led the trek, which included nine youngsters between the age of 13 and 19. They belonged to either Boy Scout Troop 238, of which Sealey is the assistant scoutmaster, or St. Lukes Episcopal Church, where he is a committee member that oversees church operations. Both are located in Galt.

"The hike was a confidence builder for the youths," said Sealey. "When they completed it, they accomplished something that not many their age group had achieved," he noted.

One young hiker who was having problems in school, said that since he just climbed the highest mountain, he knew he could now make it through high school.

In addition to being a great confidence builder, they learned about teamwork, taking care of and respecting our natural resources, and camping skills.

According to Sealey hikers burn about 6,000 calories a day at the higher altitudes. He lost 13 pounds during the trip.

"You have to force yourself to eat and drink, otherwise, you run out of gas," he said. "You have to eat a lot of carbohydrates, things like oatmeal and power bars, containing lots of sugar and starch."

He had planned the trip ever since his first trip to Mt. Whitney in 1998 when he led a similar group that included his eldest son.

Not many even get the opportunity to make the hike. The National Park Service at Mt. Whitney limits the trek to 50 hikers per day. Sealey sent a request in February and was selected in a lottery for a date in July.

"Groups from all over the world come to Mt. Whitney," he said. "Especially in July. It is the best time of year. The lows only get down to the 40's."

Sealey prepares the youngsters with meetings that cover menu planning, camping gear and safety. They are also warned about bears.

About 2 a.m. one morning, a couple of curious bears crept up on the sleeping campers. Sealey could hear the bears sniffing and pawing the tents in search of food. All the food was secured in metal bear proof containers and placed at a distance from the tents.

"We yelled at them and scared them off," he recalled.

The last time he hiked up Mt. Whitney bears broke into his sedan. They pulled the back windows down, crawled in, and ripped out the back seat to get at food left in backpacks in the car trunk.

To prepare for this event Sealey swims, lifts weights and power walks the family dogs. He also hiked up 14,000 feet Mt. Shasta earlier with a group of firefighters in June.

"We didn't make it to the top," he said. "We didn't get up early enough and the snow got too soft."

Sealey plans to make the hike again in four years, when his 9-year-old daughter gets into Girl Scouts. He is also planning more in the way of community service. Currently he is on the Galt Planning Commission and has filed to run for the city council in the upcoming election.



DDJC Investigator, Rob Sealey and his 13-year-old son pause at the 13,000 feet elevation for a photo at the Discovery Pinnacles.

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