## New Student Trip Description Explore The Temperate Rain Forest

Opal Creek, tucked away in a secluded valley in the Western foothills of the Oregon Cascade mountain range, is a gem of old-growth forest, pure creeks, and magical groves. Its beauty and rich resources have sparked controversy and struggle, invoking debate about the value of wilderness protection and showing the strength of citizens uniting against the destruction of our forests.

Gold was discovered in Opal Creek 1859, and a small mining camp was built during the Depression era. When mining was no longer profitable in the area, the U.S. Forest Service tried to open the entire valley to logging. Fortunately, a grassroots environmental protection effort, which gained national attention, culminated in Opal Creek's protection and designation as a wilderness area in 1998. Now the mining camp has been converted to an environmental education center, and rents facilities out to various groups.

This description does not cover all aspects of the trip, but it will give you a few more details about this adventure. Due to the many variables of outdoor trips, it's impossible to describe exactly what the trip will be like.

This forest is about a 2 to 3 hour drive southeast of Portland, near Mill City, Oregon. On day one we'll hike in three miles along a flat trail into the self-sustaining backcountry mining camp at Opal Creek Ancient Forest Center. Participants on this trip will be staying in a large bunkhouse with hydro-electric lighting and composting toilets. Limited showers are available although there may not be access to hot water. The rules and regulations of the camp will need to be respected at all times. Exploring the old mining equipment or underground shafts is prohibited because of the danger of a collapse.

Days will be spent doing hikes, where you only have to carry what is necessary for that day, typically between 5-15 pounds. The mileage on dayhikes could be as little as 5, or a many as 15 miles, on easy to difficult trails depending on which group you hike with during the day. It is also possible that you may have the opportunity to travel off trail, and so it is important to have sturdy footwear. If you do get new hiking boots for college we very strongly recommend breaking them in (by wearing them) with appropriate socks, so you lessen the potential of blisters during the trip.

Swimming in Opal Creek is an ever-present temptation in the summer months, providing cool relief to hikers. Some of the dangers in and around the creek are slippery rocks, logs and debris, hypothermia from staying in too long, and drowning.

Yellow jackets (wasps) can be pests at this time of the year, and people with the potential for severe reactions to stings need to carry anaphylaxis kits with them. Fire danger can be very high in August, and the threat of a wildfire is real. The camp has procedures if this happens. Participants need to be very careful with any type of fire. Our trips are non-smoking for this reason.

Common injuries which could occur on this trip include blisters on feet (from people not breaking in their new hiking boots before the trip), people cutting their feet as a result of walking barefoot, people cutting themselves with pocket knives, sprained ankles from hiking, and sunburn from not applying enough sunscreen. These are all preventable with a little caution and common sense. Please note that our trips go to remote areas and medical help is usually at least a half-day away. The mining camp has a radiophone, but cellular phones do not work here due to the thick forests and deep canyons. Please complete and return the online Health & Diet Questionnaire to inform our trip leaders of any conditions or illnesses that you may have.

Protecting the beauty of Opal Creek has been a long effort, carried out by many dedicated people. When you see the giant, verdant forests, and the unbelievably clear and pure streams, you'll understand, too, why people care so strongly about this valley. Combined with the great company of your fellow new students and your fabulous trip leaders, this will be a trip you won't soon forget. Have a great summer, and we'll see you in August!