The Trail of Tears

All of us survived our Tennessee canyon hike. The park ranger had failed to warn us that the water levels would be much higher than usual, and the hike would require multiple crossings of the rain-swollen river. What began as an innocuous off-trail experience had transformed into a psychologically and physically rigorous journey deep inside a Tennessee canyon. More than survive, we reveled in the adventure of each moment. As we reached the end of our hike, an impressive amphitheatre-like gorge with twin waterfalls opened in front of us. It was rapturous.

This past May, a group of nine students from the College of Environment and Design and six students from North Park University led by professors Linda and Alfie Vick undertook a three-week excursion along the Trail of Tears. We went to gather experiences and knowledge we could apply to a design project at the Cherokee Heritage Center in Oklahoma. We came away with far more. The resulting experience synthesized history, horticulture, mythology, graphics and ecology into an educational maelstrom that will remain in my memory for a lifetime.

We gained incredible insight into Cherokee culture, history and mythology. A veritable who’s-who list of Cherokee experts expanded on topics as diverse as medicine, folk craft, plants, history and even sports on every stage of our journey. We were so devoted to learning about Cherokee culture that we threw ourselves into one of their most popular sports, Stickball. Before this trip, I had believed that a voyage abroad was the only way to get a taste of a foreign culture. Little did I suspect that such a meaningful cultural experience lay right in my own backyard.

By stepping outside the classroom, we plunged into adventure in pursuit of such an understanding and came to know not only the site better, but ourselves and the world we inhabit better as well.

Adventure and landscape architecture should go hand-in-hand more often.

— Andrew White, MLA

Know Your Profs

Professor Ron Sawhill has worked in both large and small firms, even taking the helm to start his own firm. His projects varying from small residential designs to subdivision planning and shopping center designs. The most notable project was an 1,800 acre site in Columbus, Georgia called Oxbow Meadows. The site was once a mine and was converted into a wetland to treat wastewater as well as a wildlife refuge. Ron Sawhill in Columbus, Georgia called Oxbow Meadows.

In landscape design, Sawhill feels people can often misunderstand the land. Yet with a more knowledgeable consideration and study of the landscape, a design can connect people to it. Aesthetics should also be considered, but function must come first.

To students ready to enter the professional world, professor Sawhill urges them to stay in the profession and get their license as soon as they can. A license is your ticket to reach your professional goals, even if money is not one of them.

Look for professor Sawhill in 2nd year construction, 3rd year land planning, 4th year recreational design, and in Costa Rica for the fall semester of 2010. This will be the first time a landscape course has been offered in Costa Rica for a full semester.

— Robert Evans, Fourth Year BLA