

# COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



**Internship Title:**

**Organization Worked For:**

**Student Name:**

**Internship Dates:**

**Faculty Advisor Name**

**Department**

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**STUDENT SIGNATURE**

*Ryan Mueller*

**DATE:**

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As an outdoor equipment associate at Whittaker Mountaineering in Ashford Washington I took on many roles. From outfitting climbers with the gear necessary and appropriate for climbing Mt. Rainier in the current conditions, to working with members of the public that have traveled to the area for vacation and are now dealing with the reality of not being able to get into the park at the time they wanted due to a new reservation system that is in place. These roles and experiences have helped me accomplish the goals that I set for myself at the beginning of this internship.

One of my main goals for this internship was to refine my communication skills for educating the public on environmental information. The main way I did this was through explaining Mt. Rainier's new reservation system to people. This summer Mt. Rainier started requiring a reservation for entry into the park. Many people were not expecting this and therefore have not planned around it. What this has led to is people coming into the shop everyday and telling me they didn't know about the system and saying they don't know what to do next. My next step in this situation is to take the time to explain how to navigate the system and the reasons why it is in place. I have gotten better at doing this as time goes on because I now have a decent understanding of how people tend to react when they get this information. This has allowed me to shape my explanations in a format that people are most likely to listen to.

Over the course of this internship I have also gained a better understanding of things that hold people back from spending time outdoors. This understanding has come from conversations I've had with customers in the shop explaining what they are looking for in terms of experience in the park. The main things that are in the way of people spending more time outdoors is fitness level and comfortability driving on forest roads. I've found that people often limit themselves to only certain trails due to their fitness level, instead of challenging themselves to do part of a more difficult trail. I have also learned that many people rule out certain trails because they know they would not feel comfortable driving the road to get there. In addition to this, I learned about what drives people to spend time outside. I have learned that some people go out for the views and just want to drive and see the mountain, while others want to push themselves to their limits and climb the mountain.

One of the big takeaways I have from my internship experience is the importance of being able to navigate difficult conversations with people in regards to environmental topics. The main situation I have experienced this in has been talking with people that attempted to climb Mt. Rainier but for one reason or another were not able to summit. In many situations these people are not happy and want to talk about the things that have frustrated them. When I am faced with someone like this, my first step is always to take a step back and listen to what they are saying. I've found that this helps the person feel heard, and it allows for me to come up with a thoughtful response to what they have said. In these situations, my goal is to calm the person down and look for positive aspects of their experience.

A goal that I set for myself that was harder to accomplish was gaining a better understanding of the environmental issues people coming through the store care about. One reason this was difficult was because often people don't just outright say, here is an issue I care

about. Instead, I have to take time and listen to how they talk, act and carry themselves in order to infer what they care about. This has led me to being more observant when I am around new people.

My last goal was to examine the desires and needs of people interested in spending time outdoors and find possible solutions for these desires taking into account the accessibility of the places I recommend. Throughout my time working at Whittaker Mountaineering this summer one thing I have heard from people almost on a daily basis is they didn't know about the park's reservation system and they just want to drive to a place where they can see the mountain. After hearing this for a while and doing my best to direct people to locations where this would be possible I decided to come up with a more efficient solution. I used the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) skills that I have learned through numerous classes at Western to collect data and create a map that will direct people to viewpoints in the area. The map that I have created and attached to this report is a simple layout that highlights a number of different viewpoints in the area. The map briefly covers the conditions of the road to the viewpoints and trail options as well. My plan is to print out copies so that I am able to give them out to people that come into the store and are looking for places to see the mountain.

My coursework in GIS has prepared me with the skills necessary to produce a quality map that is able to effectively convey information through cartographic means. My experimental application of this knowledge has helped me pick up more nuanced details about what my desired audience is looking for in a map like this. I learned this by presenting the map to a number of different people that came into the shop and asking them for their feedback and perspective on it. The combination of both course work and experimental application has helped better prepare me for a career in environmental GIS.

Overall, my internship at Whittaker Mountaineering has been a very educational experience. Advice I have for other students considering this position is don't be afraid to ask questions. There are a lot of technical terms in the world of mountaineering and they are important to know when you are outfitting a climber. When I started working here I knew very little, but as I asked more and more questions about gear and climbing techniques I began to have a better understanding of the topic. This has allowed me to effectively do my job and educate the public on climbing Mt. Rainier. This has been a great experience that I recommend to anyone passionate about the outdoors and interested in educating the public on environmental topics.

## Daily Log

### Wednesday July 24, 2024 9:00am-7:00pm:

- Started out the day by researching what the current weather and route conditions were on Mt. Rainier for the upcoming climb. Then used that information to outfit climbers with the appropriate gear for their climb.
- Had conversations with a number of different people about the national park. I worked with them to come up with a plan that would best help them have the experience they wanted in the park.
  - I start out by asking if they've been to Rainier before, then I find out what it is they want to see. After that I start narrowing down what they actually want to do in the park whether that is hiking, sightseeing or driving. From there I pull out a map and start walking them through the various options they have. I give them exact directions as well as advice about where to park, what to look for and what time to arrive.
- Throughout the day I had numerous conversations with people about the parks' new reservation system. This is a source of frustration for many people and has led to a number of tense conversations. Luckily most people recognize that I am not the one that came up with the idea to put the system into place. When people come in that do not have a reservation I use it as a time to try to find alternative options for them. I try to find out what they were hoping to see in the park and then I give them suggestions for outside of the park that would be close to that. I also mention the times that they can get into the park and the expectations that allow them to gain access to the east side.

### Friday July 26th, 2024 9:00am-7:00pm:

- I started the morning by researching the weather and route conditions on a few of the most prominent peaks in the Washington Cascades (Mt. Rainier, Mt. Adams, and Mt. Baker). I did this to prepare myself for conversations that could potentially come up during the day.
- After that, I spent the majority of the morning preparing reservations for climbers for the next couple of days. I used the information I gathered about route conditions and weather on Rainier as a guide for what specific item models to include.
- This afternoon I had multiple people come into the shop that were interested in knowing what it takes to climb Rainier and the details about what a guided climb looks like. I gave them a full description of what a climb is like, the gear that is necessary and what the approximate total cost would be.
- This evening I used some of the information I learned about Mt. Adams this morning while having a conversation with a group that had just climbed it today. We talked about what the current conditions are like up there. As well as the amount of unprepared people

that they saw up on the mountain. They said that someone even had to be airlifted off of the mountain. This led me to wonder what steps could/should be taken to ensure that people are both physically and mentally prepared to climb Mt. Adams before going up there. This could take the form of public outreach or better signage along the road in and the trail to basecamp.

Friday August 2nd, 2024 9:00am-7:00pm:

- I spent the majority of the morning pulling climbing gear reservations for people climbing Rainier. In doing this I took into consideration the current conditions of the mountain and the route that the guides are taking climbers up the mountain.
- After that I began outfitting climbers with additional gear for the climb. It is common for people to show up for their climb with only half of the gear or items that will not work on the mountain. In these situations I then explain what will be necessary for them to rent and help them get the correct sizes.
- Built meal plans for climbers so that they are able to be properly nourished while on the mountain.
- I helped a couple that came in and were looking for trail recommendations in the area. I started out by asking a few questions to find out what type of trail they were looking for. Then I started walking them through a few options of trails in the park that seemed to fit what they were looking for. From there, I gave them directions on how to get to the trails and information about parking.

Friday August 9th, 2024 9:00am-7:00pm:

- Started out the morning with the same tasks I have been doing this entire time.
- Recently I have noticed that there have been a lot of people coming into the shop that don't have reservations into the park and just want to be able to drive somewhere and see the mountain. After thinking about this for a while, I decided to use my GIS skills to create a map that would show different locations where people can drive and get a mountain view.
- I worked on this map for a couple of days. One afternoon I created an arcgis feature layer online that I then downloaded onto arcgis field maps. This then allowed me to drive out to the various viewpoints and collect gps data and other information about the site. After that I put that data onto the cloud and brought it into a map view on arcgis pro. From there I took a day and created a relatively simple map that does a good job of showing where the mountain can be seen. The end goal with this map is to print it out and have it in both the rental and retail shops so that people that come into the store, pick it up and use it to get to the views they're interested in.

# Mt. Rainier Viewpoints

