

EPIC Sierra Receives Grant from REI Teen Travel Program is an 'Epic' Success

Epic Sierra Adventures, the American River Conservancy's teen education program, hit the road this summer for two sessions of "Rocks, Rivers and Ranges" tours. Participants explored the Sierra Nevada mountains and foothills on a 2 week-long whirlwind outdoor adventure. Designed for high school students (age 15 -18), Epic Sierra connects teens with nature and teaches them how their decisions and actions have an impact on the future of our environment. Our inaugural adventures this summer included 19 teens from all over California, including several local youth from Sacramento and El Dorado Counties.

"I thoroughly enjoyed myself on this trip. It opened my eyes to the importance of keeping nature sacred and untouched, as well as teaching me how minimalistic one can be to survive. It was a great team building experience too." - Sara Sheven, 17, Epic Sierra participant

Each Epic Sierra trip began on the banks of the South Fork American River in Coloma, California. Teens experienced a thrilling whitewater rafting trip and spent a full day on the Mother Lode River Center's ropes course working on team building. After exploring the gold country, groups traveled up to Lake Tahoe for a few days of multi-sport adventuring. Teens kayaked and swam in the pristine blue waters of Lake Tahoe and also took a mountain bike trek up to Fallen Leaf Lake.



The second half of each trip had teens exploring the east side of the Sierra range. After a stop in the silver mining ghost town of Bodie, groups set up camp along the shore of June Lake. Along with canoeing in Mono Lake's brackish water, teens hiked the mountainous terrain within the scenic June Lake loop. Each trip ended with a backpacking trek through the Tuolumne region in Yosemite National Park. Participants came out of the backcountry with a new perspective of wilderness conservation.

"I learned more in these two weeks than the public school system has taught me (about conservation) in my 12 years of school." - Alex Mitchell, 17, teen participant

As part of the adventure, Epic Sierra partnered with several conservation organizations to provide volunteer stewardship for the teens. Working with organizations like the American River Conservancy, Tahoe Rim Trail Association, Friends of the Inyo and Yosemite National Park, participants learned the importance of volunteering and giving back to the communities they visited.

Due to the success of Epic Sierra, the Conservancy plans to offer the program as part of its regular summer schedule. A recent grant award from REI, Inc. will help Epic Sierra build on this year's momentum as we plan the 2011 summer season. The REI \$10,000 award will help keep the program affordable for low to middle income families. REI's generous support will also provide gear and equipment for participants for the duration of the program.



The American River Conservancy, Epic Sierra Adventures and REI, Inc encourage both youth and adults to explore the outdoors. With support from grants and donors like REI, Epic Sierra is able to provide all youth, regardless of family income, the opportunity to learn new skills, step beyond boundaries and engage in a variety of outdoor recreational activities.

Additional information about the American River Conservancy and Epic Sierra Adventures can be found on our websites, www.arconservancy.org and www.epicsierra.org, or by contacting Michael Dotson or Molly Hucklebridge at 530-621-1224.