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A Clear Path on Cumberland Island

May 27, 2016



The slam of a machete against the trunk of a tree. The sharp clip of a lopper. The soft hum of a saw. These sounds provided the soundtrack for this May's Honors alternative break trip. Under the leadership of faculty mentor Dr. John Peden and Cumberland Island volunteer coordinator Laura Buckmaster, seventeen Honors students spent five days camping on Cumberland Island while helping to make it a more accessible place for visitors.

The group worked hard in the May heat and humidity to make one of the overgrown trails walkable for the island's visitors. Each person had either a lopper, a saw, or a rake with which to widen the trail, which stretches two miles inland from the beach. The hardest task that the group faced was pulling down a never-ending wall of vines that had overtaken the trail. Though this task was difficult, teamwork made it possible to complete.

"Working on the trail was overwhelming and physically demanding, but also really rewarding when we were able to look down it and see all of our progress," said Abby Slattery.

In their down time, students were able to learn about Cumberland Island's history and natural environment. They explored several of the famous Carnegie family houses located on the island, such as Plum Orchard and The Dungeness Ruins. They also saw the island's fourth sea turtle nest out of an expected 500 to 700 nests for the year.

Caitlin Hall said, "My favorite part of the trip was getting to hold a sea turtle egg, because not many people get to have that experience."

In addition to the sea turtles, the campers encountered lots of other wildlife, including several snakes, an alligator with her newly-hatched young, and the wild horses for which Cumberland Island is famous. Buckmaster explained their origin. "There is a stable population of 125 horses on the Island. They were brought over by the Carnegies as farm horses and never left."

After three nights on the Island, the group camped on the mainland in preparation for an early morning of sea kayaking. They spent around three hours on the ocean, kayaking a total of eight miles and passing landmarks including the Saint Simon's Sound and Fancy Bluff Creek.

Afterwards, they ended the trip with a last meal together and reminisced over the week. Trip leaders Leah Anderson and Garrett Metropol were grateful for the opportunity to work with such an enthusiastic group. Anderson said, "Everything we did was strenuous work, whether it be sea kayaking or clearing trails. No matter what, everyone was awesome and had great attitudes."

Metropol agreed, "It was really enjoyable. Everyone wanted to help with anything before we even asked."

One of the greatest takeaways from the trip was personal and group growth. Cara Perrella said, "I went on this trip to push myself and try new things, and I didn't expect to like it as much as I did." For many people, this was



their first time camping, and the new and experienced campers helped each other along the way, whether it be setting up a tent, helping make dinner or stuffing a sleeping bag into its tote. Slattery said, "Everyone was really comfortable with one another and was able to show their true personalities."

This opportunity to meet and work with more students within the Honors Program was something Abi Johnson did not take for granted. "My favorite thing about this week was getting to meet more people in the Honors Program because after freshman year, it is harder to get to know the new incoming students," she said.



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A Coney Island of the Mind

May 27, 2016



Wonder Wheel at Coney Island

Counterculture poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "A Coney Island of the Mind" wistfully looks back at a September day spent amidst jellybeans and licorice sticks, a time of youthful innocence now lost, retrievable only by memory. Since the publication of this poem in 1958, Coney Island has also moved past its prime, its original splendor existing only in the minds of those who had the privilege of witnessing the park firsthand. Senior writing and linguistics major Maggie Delisle (writing and linguistics '17), however, plans to transpose Coney Island's golden years from memory to the page, bringing them to life once again through her Honors Capstone Project.

Delisle's creative work will consist of a seventy-page novella focusing on Luna Park, one of the original iconic parks built on the famous boardwalk, seen through the lens of a Jewish girl growing up on the island in the 1940s. One of the fiction writer's main concerns is authenticity, so Delisle spent a few days both in Brooklyn and on Coney Island participating in primary

research for her novella. This research involved indulging in authentic Nathan's hot dogs, riding the Wonder Wheel, and doing everything just short of travelling back in time to see Luna Park as it must have existed for Lawrence Ferlinghetti so many years ago.

Delisle's interest in Coney Island dates back to when she was a kid wandering through the Tybee Island Light Station and Museum, which features an exhibit on a defunct Tybee Island carnival.

"I was obsessed with it when I was younger," said Delisle. "And although the Tybee carnival was very old, Coney Island was the very first amusement park in United States, so I started to do research on it, and I've been really interested in it ever since."

Luna Park in particular stood out to Delisle. Built in 1903, its 260,000 lights illuminated the coast line until the park tragically burned down in 1944 and was eventually replaced with a five building apartment complex. Unable to witness the beauty of Luna Park firsthand, Delisle turned to archival material, a search for information that took her to the Brooklyn Public Library, The Coney Island Public Library, the Coney Island Museum, and the large New York Public Library.

Delisle said, "One artifact I found was a microfilm on the burning of Luna Park. There was even a photo. I actually had tears in my eyes. Seeing this piece of history was more than I would have ever imagined. It just made the project that much more real to me."

Other sources she utilized included pamphlets and postcards from the early 1900s, census records for Jewish neighborhoods, and a document outlining a plan to revitalize Coney Island in the 1970s. Although these sources proved immensely helpful for Delisle, her most valuable research extended outside the archives and onto the streets of Coney Island. Not only did she get to experience the setting of her novella firsthand—she was able to live in it for a few days by staying in a historical Jewish neighborhood.

"Just being in the area helped me figure things out, because Jewish populations in New York are very different from what you'd expect," Delisle said. "It's very much traditional. People dress conservatively. I stayed on Ocean Parkway, which is a very important road in Coney Island's history. It helped connect Brooklyn to Coney Island, and it really helped me get a feel for my novella's setting."

In addition to snapping photographs and experiencing the locale for her novella, she had the chance to interview several locals.

"I mainly talked to shop owners who'd been in the area for a long time, including a woman who was in a documentary about Coney Island," said Delisle. "The people that I met kept asking me, 'you're going to let me read this when you're done, right?' Which was very intimidating. I hope I'll be able to produce something that will make them proud."

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