

Chapter 1

Environmental Traveling Companions Organization Information

Mission

ETC makes the joy and challenge of outdoor adventures accessible to people with disabilities and disadvantaged youth; inspiring self-confidence, connection to nature, and stewardship of the environment.

Philosophy

ETC started taking people with disabilities and disadvantaged youth on outdoor adventures in 1972, beginning with a whitewater rafting program on the Stanislaus River in Northern California. ETC's wilderness programs have grown to include adventures in sea kayaking, whitewater rafting, and cross-country skiing as well as extended youth leadership trips in the Youth LEAD (Leadership, Environment, Adventure, Diversity) Program. Our primary goal, then and now, has been to provide affordable and accessible outdoor adventure and environmental education experiences for people with special needs. We share adventures with a wide variety of people with disabilities and youth from underserved and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

For many of our participants, an ETC trip is their first experience in the outdoors, and for others it is a continuing step towards independent wilderness travel. Through working (and playing) together as a group, we can gain a new understanding of each other and of the balance of life in the outdoors. We hope that an ETC adventure will be an unforgettable experience that can be applied to everyday living.

An ETC trip presents our participants with new challenges and opportunities to gain self-esteem and personal strength. Because we believe that people become strong by doing things for themselves, especially those tasks that push our personal comfort zones, we encourage and ask that our participants take part in all aspects of a trip. This participation creates ownership of the experience in a way other approaches cannot. At ETC, we do trips *with* people, not *for* people. This is the key to ETC's philosophy and is reflected in our approach to all of our adventure programs.

Some of the challenges we present to our participants – such as kayaking across Raccoon Strait on San Francisco Bay, paddling through class III rapids, team building initiatives, and skiing through snowy meadows – may be a first time experience. These experiences require care, love, camaraderie and a spirit of cooperation. In this atmosphere, participants learn that many of their limits have been self-imposed or imposed by external forces such as society, family or friends. They learn that by testing these limits, they can overcome their fears and realize their own unique abilities.

ETC trips also involve the sharing of many different skills, backgrounds, and points of view. We often combine people of differing abilities together on a trip - a disadvantaged youth helps a woman with a visual impairment step over rocks; a woman with a spinal cord injury learns to paddle a raft physically supported by a person without a disability. Every situation and combination is unique and calls for a degree of sensitivity not often required in a commercial setting.

An ETC trip, however, is an experience that goes far beyond the mechanics of the actual activity. It is of equal importance to us that participants become aware of the delicate ecological relationships of land, water, plants and animals in the ecosystems in which our programs take place. The natural environment is an ideal classroom for experiential learning. Some of this learning occurs as guides and participants share knowledge and impressions of the area around them. Other learning takes place in more structured group activities and games. It is important that ETC guides learn to recognize and capture “teachable moments.” Environmental education is a cooperative venture between guides and participants; everyone has knowledge to share and knowledge to glean through shared experience. In this sharing we are all teachers and we are all students.

Participant groups vary greatly. Participants’ needs and desires, and what they hope to achieve, will depend on the group and its background. It is ETC’s task to ensure that people have a safe, challenging and well-rounded outdoor experience - one that is based on respect for each other, the natural environment, and ourselves.

History

Over Christmas dinner, 1971, river guides Mark Dubois, Ron Caldwell and Fred Dennis, gave birth to an incredible idea: sharing their love of river running and their passion for the stunning limestone river canyon of the Stanislaus River with people who didn't have opportunities to experience outdoor adventure. In 1972, ETC was born on the banks of the Stanislaus when these three visionaries, now joined enthusiastically by other commercial river guides, made plans to launch retired patchwork rubber navy rafts and invited urban youth and people with disabilities to join them. The dream grew as more guides began volunteering for ETC, and more participants with special needs were given the chance to share in the magic of the Stanislaus. Three years later, in 1975, ETC became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and spent the better part of the next 5 years launching new and innovative adventure programs - backpacking in Pt. Reyes, rock climbing in local mountain areas, snow camping and cross-country skiing in Bear Valley.

In 1978, ETC moved our office (from then Executive Director Graciella Rossi's home on Taraval Street in San Francisco) to Fort Mason Center where we still reside today. Then, in 1981, ETC painfully lost the Stanislaus River to the New Melones Dam project. The following year ETC transitioned our river program to the South Fork American River in Coloma, California. With our new administrative home so close to the San Francisco Bay it wasn't long before dreams drifted towards starting a sea kayaking program. Driven by requests from participant groups for a local outdoor adventure program and the passions of volunteers, among them Jim Noyes and Diane Poslosky, the sea kayaking program sprang to life in 1983.

In 1984, one of the aforementioned visionary volunteers, Diane Poslosky, stepped into the role of Executive Director - beginning a tenure that continues today - some 30+ years later!

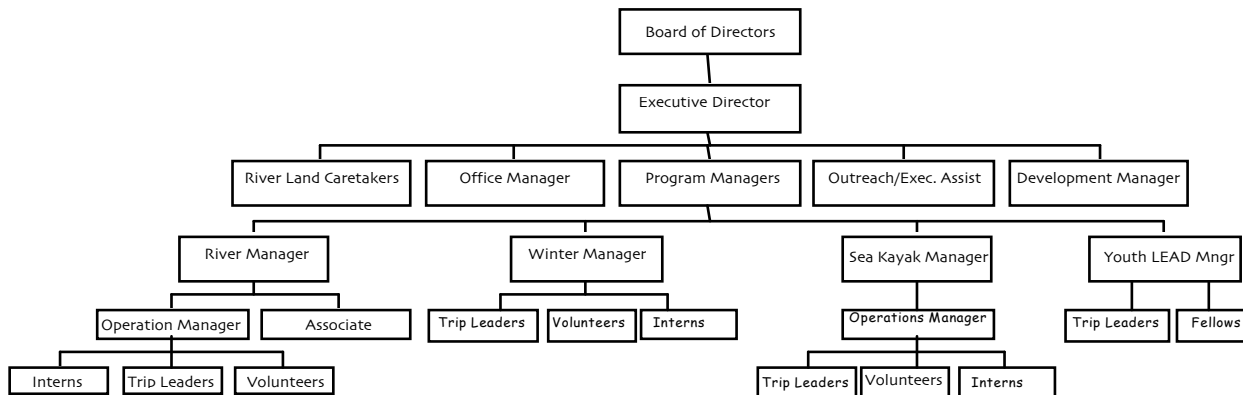
After multiple locations and years of leasing land to support the River Program, ETC found a home in a piece of undeveloped land along the banks of the South Fork American and in 1998 began our first major capital campaign - raising 1.2 million dollars in 18 months! The turning of

the century brought completion of the building of our accessible and ecologically designed river camp - and with this completion ETC now has a permanent place to call home.

Organizational Overview

ETC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides year-round outdoor adventure programs for people with special needs. ETC's administrative offices are located in San Francisco though programs utilize multiple sites throughout northern California for direct outdoor programming. ETC serves 2000-2300 participants each year through single and multi-day outdoor adventure programs. The organization is governed by a Board of Directors, composed of volunteer community members with backgrounds in business, finance, law, media, fundraising, outdoor recreation management and disability advocacy. ETC has a team of 6-8 year-round staff members, 6-12 seasonal staff members, and over 300 active volunteer guides.

Organizational Chart



Board of Directors

ETC is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors to whom the Executive Director reports. This group of people works closely with the Executive Director, Program Managers and staff to develop an annual strategic plan, to insure fiscal solvency, and the overall stability of the organization. The full Board meets quarterly with various sub-committees (e.g. Major Gifts) meeting bi-monthly. Board members assist ETC through their various areas of expertise, networking on behalf of ETC, fundraising, and through contributions of funds and time. The Board holds the ultimate responsibility of hiring the Executive Director and overseeing the fiscal responsibilities with the Executive Director.

Executive Director

ETC's Executive Director is hired and evaluated by the Board of Directors. The Executive Director is responsible for hiring and evaluating the core staff team. As well, he/she oversees the budgeting and fiduciary responsibility for the organization. The Executive Director works with the staff to develop new programs and to ensure that we are delivering outdoor adventures and environmental education programs that are safe, inspirational, and accessible. Additionally, the Executive Director works with the staff to maintain and develop funding and program relationships and partnerships.

Programs

ETC has four distinct adventure programs: Sea Kayak, Whitewater Rafting, Cross Country Skiing, and Youth LEAD.

Sea Kayaking Program

The Sea Kayaking Program is based on San Francisco Bay and Tomales Bay and offers day and overnight trips in both locations. On San Francisco Bay the program operates day trip on Richardson Bay and overnight trips to Angel Island. On Tomales Bay the program offers day trips out of Heart's Desire, "base camp" trips with groups camping at Hearts Desire and paddling one or two days, and expedition overnights to remote beaches.

Whitewater Rafting Program

The Whitewater Rafting Program is based in Lotus, California on the South Fork of the American River. The program runs single-day and multi-day class I-III river rafting trips, where the ETC River Camp serves as a permanent base. Day trips most often launch from camp and raft the "Gorge" run - an 11-mile section beginning in class I-II rapids and progressing into the class III Gorge. Multi-day trips have the option of either running the "Lower" again or moving upriver to the "Upper" (a.k.a. Chili Bar) run. The Upper is an 11-mile section beginning immediately in class III rapids and relaxing into class I-II whitewater. These trips end at the ETC River Camp. The Whitewater Rafting Program also facilitates educational floats on the South Yuba River through a partnership with the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) to teach participants about the life cycle of salmon.

Cross Country Skiing Program

The Winter Cross-Country Skiing Program is based out of Arnold; a small town nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Mountains northeast of Stockton. The Winter Cross Country Skiing Program runs multi-day winter trips including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, environmental education programs at Calaveras Big Trees State Park (known for it's rare and beautiful Giant Sequoia Redwood trees), making snow people, having snowball fights, playing group games and sharing relaxation time in the cabin. The cross-country skiing portion of our trips is conducted ~30 miles northeast of Arnold in Bear Valley at the Bear Valley Nordic Ski Area, where 3000+ acres of groomed trails are available for skiing.

Youth LEAD Program

The Youth LEAD (Leadership, Environment, Adventure, Diversity) Program annually serves 25-40 students (ages 14-18). These unique and intensive summer courses, range in length from 14-21 days. The program integrates outdoor adventures with opportunities for youth to build leadership skills, environmental stewardship, interpersonal communication skills and agricultural literacy, all while working and living together in a supportive community environment. Courses include outdoor leadership and technical skills training in backcountry travel, whitewater rafting and sea kayaking as the students travel the path of the watershed from the mountains to the sea. Longer courses also may include a community service project on an organic farm where students learn about water uses in California and food production. Eight graduates are hired each year as

part of our Youth Fellowship Program, a year-round internship program focused on developing outdoor leadership and environmental education skills.

Types of Trips

Participant Group Trips

ETC collaborates with rehabilitation and independent living centers, schools, social services agencies, and recreation centers to provide safe, exciting and educational adventure programs. Most of the participants in our programs come as part of groups ranging in size from 10-80 people. Participant group trips are arranged, planned and coordinated in conjunction with an agency staff person and the appropriate program manager. To keep costs low, agency groups usually provide their own food.

Benefit Trips

These trips are intended as a means of both fundraising and raising public awareness about ETC's mission and programs. Participants on Benefit Trips pay trip fees that are more consistent with commercial rates than our standard reduced (and highly subsidized) trip fees. Proceeds from these trips go toward ETC's scholarship fund to provide financial assistance for participants who would not be able to participate in outdoor adventure programs if it were not for this additional financial aid. Additionally, these trips are an ideal venue for spreading the word about ETC programs and the importance of maintaining accessible adventure recreation opportunities for people in our communities who have disabilities or come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Unlike other trips we run, on benefit trips ETC is responsible for coordinating meals and the cost is absorbed into trip fees.

Individuals Trips

These trips typically range in length from 1 to 3 days and are designed for participants with special needs who do not have a larger group or agency affiliation (or for those who choose to return on their own after participating in a previous group trip). Specific dates are set aside in the programming calendars for these trips. Program Managers coordinate trip details and logistics with each individual participant.

Shared Expeditions

These trips are extended outdoor adventures ranging from 3-15 days and are held in distant and semi-remote wilderness locations. Participants on Shared Expedition Trips include people with special needs who have previous experience with ETC and are given varying levels of scholarship depending on financial need. Family and friends, as well as members of the general public who are interested in learning about and supporting ETC's mission, are welcome to participate in both local trips and Shared Expeditions.