

Oregon State University Extension Service

METRO CONNECTION

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Cataloging Wild Mushroom Varieties Turns into a Multi-Dimensional Outdoor Educational Experience



In October, 15 high school students, led by 4-H Program Assistant Seng Saechao, set out for **Opal Creek Ancient Forest**, one of the last low-elevation old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest, for a five-day immersive experience. This was the first week-long educational program held at Opal Creek.



The students from Alliance High School at Meek Campus, an alternative high school with technical career options, including natural resources, worked with Opal Creek educators to find, identify, and catalog wild mushroom varieties from the lush forest floor. Now back in school, the students are working together to complete a Mushroom Guidebook that will help visitors to Opal Creek identify edible and poisonous fungi. The aim of the guidebook project is for the students to help the Opal Creek forest and the visiting public.



Two Opal Creek staff educators accompanied students and chaperones as they settled into rustic camp cabins at **Jawbone Flats**. The warm, dry, fall weather helped to make the experience memorable for everyone. The group combined classroom learning with scavenging the forest for three days searching for mushroom colonies, carefully packing samples, then returning to the lab classroom to identify and record their findings. Students were provided with professional cameras and voice recorders to document their investigative work. Learning how to use the equipment—and have fun with it—added to the adventure and learning experience.

Students see how their contributions make a difference to the environment, giving them a sense of self-worth, accomplishment, and value. Outdoor educational experiences are a great way to spark interest in secondary education and exploring career choices like the sciences and natural resource fields.

In addition to gathering data for their publication, the students completed school work they were missing, earned credit in Science and English, tried eating mushrooms for the first time or discovered edible varieties seldom found in grocery stores, and fell in love with a wild, very special area of Oregon.

Many students are excited to return to the forest in spring for another education program and others are eager to explore Opal Creek Forest with their families. Educators and students alike agreed Opal Creek was one of the best outdoor environmental experiences they have ever had!

To learn more about the work of 4-H in the Portland area click [here](#).