

Student Expedition Team Climbs Active Volcano in the Pacific Northwest



Above (left to right): David Whiteside, Malik Bassett and Keith Young Jr

Thirty five years ago, on May 18, 1980 Mount Saint Helens erupted. The volcano spewed out molten rocks and ash high into the sky. This natural event changed the landscape of the area. Fifty seven people died in the eruption along with eleven million animals and several species of plants. Over the years the ecosystem has been going through secondary succession, a renewal or regrowth that an ecosystem undergoes after a destructive event such as a fire, avalanche, agricultural clearing, deforestation, or disease.

On October 25, 2015 student scientists and young explorers, Keith Young Jr (senior at Eastern Michigan University), Malik Bassett (11th grader at Detroit Edison Early College of Excellence) and David Whiteside (11th grader at Detroit Ben Carson High School), along with Mr. Keith Young Sr., founder of Ecotek Lab and the Young Xplorers Program, traveled to Washington State to take their shot at scaling Mount Saint Helens.

The purpose of the expedition was to better understand the ecology of the region as it recovers. David Whiteside collected soil and lava rock samples. Malik Bassett oversaw all field work on plant biology, while Keith Young Jr. was responsible for gathering geophysical data. Climbing Mount Saint Helens was very challenging. The terrain was steep and dense. The oxygen level in the air decreased as the team ascended toward the summit. The weather was volatile. The team hiked through torrential rainfall combined with 45 mph wind gusts, hail, and temperatures as low as 1.67 degrees Celsius (35 degrees Fahrenheit).

This was the first time that student scientists from the YoungXplorers program had attempted to climb an active volcano. The first 4,800 feet of the expedition team's climb was through Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The remaining portion of the climb (1,200 feet) was through a boulder field which was filled with jagged rocks and lava fragments from the 1980 eruption. The team did not scale to the summit due to dangerous blizzard conditions, but their curiosity and willingness to forge ahead in the face of adversity was admirable. They gained valuable experience that will help them when they return in the summer of 2016 to continue their research. The team is now working in the lab to analyze the chemical profile and morphology of the volcanic rock, plants and soil that they collected in the field.



David Whiteside gathering soil samples



Keith Young Jr. using GPS device to mark waypoint



Malik Basset gathering plant samples

About the YoungXplorers Program

YoungXplorers is an affiliate company of the Ecotek Lab. It provides students with opportunities to participate in field expeditions that lead to research in the lab. To learn more please visit YoungXplorers website at <http://www.ecotek-us.com/youngxplorers/index.htm>