Geology camp marks 40th year in town

Every summer group stays at Chateau Apres

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Experience in the field can be as good as gold when it comes to landing a job, especially in the mining industry.

For its fortieth summer in a row the Wasatch-Uinta Geology Field Camp has brought undergraduates to scour the nearby mountains to identify everything from valuable minerals to shale.

Students in the camp call the Chateau Apres home for six weeks where owner Ed Hosenfeld has been hosting the group since it began.

Program director and geology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Phillip Brown said the program has relationships with people throughout the community including some that allow the students on their private land.

The undergraduates, hailing from six different universities including the University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Minnesota-Duluth, University of Iowa, University of Illinois, Western Kentucky University and Michigan State University, spend much of the camp creating color-coded maps of an area identifying the different rocks on a site. From those they create what is called a geologic cross section, a side view of the site and the layers underneath.

Students also have to know how those rocks were formed to have a better understanding of the geologic history.

“They map the surface, and then we generally have them try to tell us what is going on,” Brown said.

In Utah that could be a lot. Brown explained one of the reasons Park City was selected as home to the program is because over two billion years of Earth’s history is reflected in the mountains in the area.

“They need to see their projects in the context of the bigger picture,” Brown said.

Once upon a time Utah boasted prime beach-front property because it was on the edge of the ancient North American continent. Since then Brown said everything west of the state has been formed by collisional events that the rocks bore witness to.

Students uncover the story through work in the surrounding areas and field trips to places like Antelope Island and Grand Teton National Park.

The experience allows students to apply what they have learned in class to real life while helping students figure out weather or not they want a job in the industry.

“It’s hard to know before they get here who will take an interest and show an aptitude,” Brown said.

Those that do show an interest and aptitude often find work. Two former teaching assistants for the program went on to work for Newmont Mining Corporation, a very large gold producer. Brown said now is a good time to get into the field. In the past, the price of minerals and oil has been low so very few people...

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People were hired in the industry. But as the prices go up, mines are looking to hire again and are in need of workers with experience.

"They can't find geologists that have been trained because metal prices have been so low for so long," Brown said.

A mining company in Minnesota said it finds camp participants Erik Haroldson.

Like many other students in the program he is in his last year of college. When he graduates from the University of Minnesota-Duluth Haroldson said he will consider going back to the mining company he started working with last summer.

His job included analyzing deposits to learn what areas are feasible to mine.

He said he has enjoyed his six weeks in Park City.

"I like it, I like getting out and being in the outdoors (and) I enjoy the area," Haroldson said.

Adjusting to the elevation has proven to be one of the more difficult things about the program.

"Being from the Midwest the hills take a bit of getting used to. We do a lot of hiking straight uphill," he said.

But the elevation won't stop another trip to take advantage of the powder in Park City. Haroldson said he would like to come back in the winter.

Brown said for those who decide on other career paths the camp is still a valuable experience and teaches practical problem-solving skills by helping the students start with an unknown and work toward a solution.

The program is not all work and no play. Students often take advantage of climbing opportunities in Little Cottonwood Canyon or play everything from ultimate Frisbee to soccer in the field across from the Chateau.

"Most of our injuries at camp are sports-related," Brown said.

Students and staff also take advantage of the night life and pop up at local Main Street establishments like the No Name Saloon.

Brown added that while some of the groups can get a little rowdy they ultimately try to be respectful to the Chateau's neighbors and preserve the relationships they have built up over the past 40 years.

"We do everything we can to be good citizens and contribute to the color of the area," Brown