

Profile: Mike Weatherston



Hometown:

Dunedin, New Zealand

Program:

Summer Camp USA

Tell us in a few hundred words which Camp you were at and what you got up to at camp?

I was at Indian Head Camp, which is in North Eastern Pennsylvania. Indian Head is a very large camp with 280 staff and 600 kids aged 7 – 16. The camp has amazing facilities and the kids are amazing. I was very lucky to be part of the adventure department in 2010 and again in 2011. My time this year was mixed between managing the bike workshop that keeps a fleet of 55 mountain bikes going, teaching mountain biking, rock climbing, team building on the low ropes course, climbing on the high ropes, and running the zip line.

Each summer the kids go on a camping trip with their bunk around North Eastern Pennsylvania and Northern New York. When we are on trips we go hiking, cliff jumping, swimming, rock climbing and abseiling (but they call it rappelling). So it is a pretty eventful & full on job, but super fun & rewarding. But once the kids have gone to bed each night there is also a lot of fun to be had with about 200 young adults all living in the same place. But I will leave it at that!

Top 3 memories of Summer Camp?

1. Dream Week – where the kids that will be attending the camp the following year come to camp for 5 days. They have so much energy and are super excited about doing everything.

2. A trip to Ricketts Glenn State Park in Pennsylvania with a group of really enthusiastic and fun 10 & 11 year old girls for 2 days where I took them through the much anticipated 100 foot rappel (30 metre abseil).

3. Hurricane Irene. Although it didn't come through in the normal Summer Camp season I was still at camp working. We lost power, phone & internet for 3 days at camp. Walking over the Mountain Bike Trails in the days following Irene was amazing. Trees that I had ridden past everyday – some 20 metres high had just fallen over, roots and all. It was a good time to learn how to use a chainsaw!

Was there a camper that stands out in your mind? If so why?

There is a camper called Justin that comes to camp ever year, he was 8 years old this year. The cut off age limit to sign up for the Mountain Bike elective is 11 years old. But every week he managed to get him name on the list – not that he could ride a bike to start with. The first couple of days with him I had to run along the trails beside him holding the brakes on for him and holding his bike up. But undeterred he got the hang of it and left camp in August telling me he was hoping to get a new bike for his birthday this year. I look forward to going back to camp next year and seeing his progress.

Were there any times that were hard?

There were a few times that were hard, particularly once fatigue starts to set in towards the end of the summer. The camp program is well designed to finish with the day to day programming when everyone – campers & staff are getting worn out and then shift gears to really fun events & activities that create the energy to get everyone through that last 10 days.



WORKING ADVENTURES WORLDWIDE
www.iep.org.nz

Did you travel after camp? Tell us about your adventures – where did you go?

I didn't travel after camp this year, but last year, I rented a car with 2 friends who I came over from NZ with and rock climbed and kayaked in the Appalachian mountains of New York, Vermont & New Hampshire. Then we took a bus over to Denver, Colorado (travelling on the greyhound bus is something everyone should experience) where we rented another car and drove around Colorado, Arizona & Utah for 2 weeks. We dropped the car off in Vegas, partied there for a few days before I went up to Wyoming to Rock Climb with a friend I met at camp. After Wyoming I travelled over to San Francisco where I was for my final 5 days in the country.

What was the food & accommodation like?

Our Food Service Director is a guy called Mike Gaynord who runs a very successful catering company out of Philadelphia in the winter. So the food is very good even though the kitchen is cooking for 850 people 3 times a day. The food can't be too extravagant though, or else the kids won't eat it.

I lived in a tent all summer. It was big enough to walk around in and I shared it with one other staff member. I find it very good because it is under the trees in the shade all day so when the cabins become saunas after a 35 degree day my tent is still a nice temperature. The adventure staff have a different living situation to the rest of the staff because we are always coming and going from the camping trips.

What is something unexpected/different/strange about USA compared to home?

The brakes on their bikes are on the opposite side to ours. I definitely didn't expect to go over the handlebars when I thought I was pulling on the rear brake!

Do you have any advice for someone who wants a Summer Camp adventure?

Don't hesitate. Start saving your money early on and get your visa well before you think you will need it. Then when you know where you going find out as much about the camp & the area as you can.

Did you have a good experience going on Summer Camp with IEP?

Yes, Twice!!!

What did you value about going to Summer Camp with IEP?

Nothing is ever a problem and the team is super helpful.

Did you gain anything from Camp that will benefit you in what you do next?

I learned a lot of technical skills – particularly rappel/ abseil & rock climbing setups that will be helpful for me here. I also gained some very valuable experience working as a bike mechanic – something that I'd always thought about doing back home.

What is next for you?

Tour Guiding at Larnach Castle and driving bus tours around the lower South Island for the Summer and then back to camp next year.

