

BIO 299: An Eco Adventure of 'Multitudinous' Proportions

Richard Meyers was among the MCCC students who took part in Dr. Jerry Coleman's Field Biology class this past summer in West Virginia.

by **Richard Meyers**
Special to the Montgazette

In early June, I took part in a holistic, meaningful and enlightening experience as part of Dr. Jerry Coleman's class: "Bio 299 Field Biology in West Virginia."

It's an under-the-radar course I heard about from my cousin, who had taken the class in 2010. Her description enticed me to go on the trip, which is now in its 12th year.

Bio 299 is a field-bio course in the environmental issues, ecology and geology of West Virginia. The state is perfect for this kind of learning. The two-

week field trip included visits to deep caverns, multitudinous uninhabited grazing land, forested ecosystems and – and this is my favorite – the sound of Jerry's recorder echoing off the walls of some ancient moonshiner's cave-den.

My expectations were surpassed tenfold by this two-week sojourn. Dr. Coleman, a long-time resident of Morgantown, W.Va., was once a professor at West Virginia University. Not only does he know everyone, he knows the area like the back of his hand. At no point did we students feel lost or scared, except when Jerry would jokingly grab our ankles in the dark, causing us to freak out thinking

we were being attacked by a rattlesnake or other wild animal. To fully understand the course's objectives, you have to look at West Virginia's history of ecological imbalance because it's a place of constant logging and coal-mining. There are many controversial arguments about what these industries have done to the state's biodiversity and the health of its residents.

West Virginia is the second-most mined state in the country. Acidic mine drainage, for example, pollutes and even destroys drinking water supplies and fish habitats. Logging has wiped out species that once lived in the forest canopies.



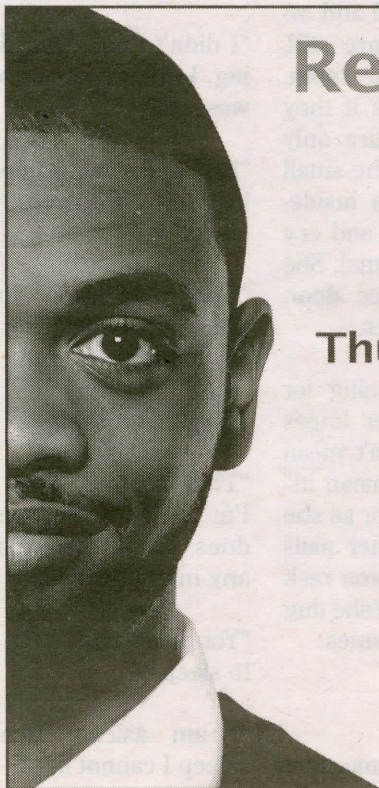
Photo provided by Richard Meyers

Modern day coal mining in West Virginia

To explore and learn about these topics, we met and talked to several environmental activists, watershed volunteers, geologists, foresters and even an organic farmer named Jim (my favorite person).

All were aware of the environmental issues facing the state. We learned an intense amount, and I'm glad we were required to keep a journal.

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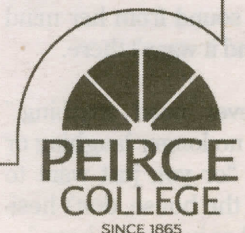
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