You cannot stay on the summit forever; you have to come down again. So why bother in the first place? One climbs, one sees. One descends, one sees no longer, but one has seen. There is an art of conducting oneself in the lower regions by the memory of what one saw higher up.

-René Daumal
Several years ago, I somewhat naively quit my summer job and began what was to be the first in a long string of backpacking trips throughout the Rockies. I would be lying if I said things went smoothly. There were quarter-sized blisters, missed trail junctions, heavy packs, some old injuries were aggravated, tempers flared at times, we nearly ran headlong into a bear, and finally, suddenly, the pickup truck gave up the ghost on I-70 outside of Denver, promptly ending the journey. There were beautiful moments too: swimming in a thermal-heated river in the Yellowstone back country, endless gorgeous views from the high passes on the trail in Glacier, the Mylanta-colored lakes of Banff, and the rice and cream of mushroom soup concoction that never would have tasted quite as good if it had not followed a brutal 14-mile day.

For each person on that trip, our summer experiences were a redirection of sorts. Something lingered in each of us long after we had rejoined our previous lives. It was not necessarily a comfortable feeling; we had learned something about ourselves that we could not quite put a finger on. For just a moment, it elevated us enough to take a quick bearing on our next destination, a spot in the distance that we were not able to see below the forest canopy of our everyday lives. Although the hot fire of our experience had died down, the embers remained, burning slowly and redirecting our thoughts. For one of my friends, those embers turned a passion for art into a new business and life in the mountains and forests of Oregon. For another, it redefined what it meant to be young and cancer-free immediately following a yearlong intense fight when the future did not seem so clear. For me, it reignited a passion for exploring the wild places that I had not felt since I was much younger, and it began to pave a path that eventually led me here to Kalamazoo College.

The intention of this first publication of Embers is to celebrate and highlight the diverse history of the wilderness community here on campus. The year 2014 will be the 40th LandSea trip for the College, marking a significant milestone for this program. The Kalamazoo Outing Club’s (KOC) growing popularity is a new chapter for an organization that also began nearly 40 years ago. That first KOC soon morphed into the Wilderness Education Program, and WEP ignited student’s interests in the wilderness with trips to local destinations, backpacking in the Appalachians, and even a climbing trip to Mexico. The KOC has strived to maintain the mission of the WEP and has arranged trips to Kentucky, Nevada, and California.

Embers simply seeks to gather the memories that remain after trips throughout the year—my first portaging experience, listening to coyotes, making brownie batter around the fire, two weeks away from electronics, MOOOOOSE! The list is long and only continues to grow. Although the reflections represented here occur in places separated by many miles, and contain experiences that are personal to those who have contributed, we hope you appreciate the stories these pictures and writings tell; the embers that remain in our memories, slowly burning, and likely forever.

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During the past forty years, LandSea and the Kalamazoo Outing Club have traveled miles away from the Mitten to explore new places. For decades, LandSea existed in Canada, but the program has recently returned to the United States. The KOC has held firm to its mission by providing students with an exotic range of trips—locally, nationally, and internationally.

1970
The Kalamazoo Outing Club (KOC) forms due to the efforts of students and sponsorship from biology professor Dr. Paul Olexia.

1973
Kalamazoo College President George Rainsford introduces the vision for a freshman program centered on a wilderness education experience.

1974
Six incoming freshmen embark on a four-day trip through the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore Wilderness Education Program led by students.

1975
First-year outdoor orientation program returned to Killarney Provincial Park.

1979
The KOC goes to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the spring and Everglades National Park in the winter.

1999
Due to college logistics, LandSea moves to the Adirondack Park.

2010
KOC goes to Red River Gorge.

2011
Jorich Horner becomes the director of LandSea.

2012
LandSea moves to Algonquin Provincial Park.

2013
KOC goes to Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the spring and Everglades National Park in the winter.

A Trek Through Time

Italicized parks indicate previous and current LandSea sites. Many places have been visited by the KOC, and the exact location of two trips is unknown.

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The rain came down and down and down. My canoe rocked precariously on the surf of the lake as whitecaps licked at the hull and the sky continued to drop on us. My second-hand rain slicker offered poor protection, and it was a matter of minutes before the water soaked straight through every layer I was wearing. It rained until I felt water in my bones. I silently cursed the sky. It seemed it would never end, getting colder and sharper. We would be out in it all day. From what I could deduce with my limited knowledge and experience, we had ten kilometers left, eight hours to go, no lunch in sight, no walls, just us against the water and the cold Canadian air.

The scene was miserable, but all I saw on the faces of the people around me were smiles. Cheers and jeers echoed across the grey waters as we pulled ourselves stroke by stroke toward our next camp. Why? Why had I signed up for this? Why did I think it would be a good idea to spend my first sixteen days as a college student in the middle of the wilderness? I was a suburbanite. I didn't camp. I played X-box and drove to the movies on weekends. I couldn't handle this, this exile from the First World! I was going to die out here in the woods with my peers watching and laughing. How could they be laughing? It's only our first day away from civilization and nature is already kicking my ass sideways?

Ten months later, thunder flaps through the cold sky of northern Minnesota as sheets of cobalt glisten and roll against my bare ankles. I'm standing, planted shin deep in the chilly shallows of the lake where my family spends our summer vacation.

In response to the swiftly approaching storm, dozens of loon birds cry an opus from a dozen hidden angles and an eerie chorus coats the vastness of the lake before me. I bow my head as beads of water crawl down my skin, past bony knees, trying to reach the lake they came from. A swarm of water beetles scurry across the wobbling surface of the water. I wonder if they sense what's coming. The sky darkens above it all.

Suddenly, the horizon flashes. I look up. It's like watching the beating heart of the storm. In response to the lightning, the chorus cheers on, now louder and more frantic.

Then it happens. I see the wall of wind swoop in across the water at the far end of the lake. It's the front. It must be a mile away, but it only takes a few seconds to reach me. The subtle line between the dark blue water and grey stormy waters touch me with a whisper. It only takes a few seconds to reach me, but the memory lasts forever, and suddenly it smashes through me. The fist of the storm. Cold. Hard rain drops. Shiny sheets of it roll through the air and it falls everywhere.

I should be concerned about the lightning. I should be bothered by the sudden precipitous drop in temperature. I should go indoors, seek the warmth of a fireplace and my family's company. A year ago I would have run for shelter. Today, there is nowhere in the universe I would rather be. I feel something, standing outside in the center of this maelstrom. It's something that is not there at all, yet I can't turn away from it.

It is day fifteen of my first wilderness expedition. In the last two weeks I have been further north than ever before. I've seen more stars in one night than I have in my entire life up to this point. I've journeyed through pine forests more beautiful than any cathedral back home. I think about the misery I felt on day one as we left base camp. The misery I documented on water-stained pages of my journal, the rain and the wetness on the inside of my second-hand jacket. I never would have guessed it, but I want to linger here in the woods for just a bit longer. Tomorrow we'll be getting on a bus bound for the college I now belong to. I may never see this place again.

It's dusk and we've made camp already. As we sit above the edge of a lake, hunched in our fleece, the horizon fills my eye. Laid out before us at the end of an immense stretch of dark blue water dotted with lilies, the crooked skyline is cut by the tips of evergreens and frays the light of the fading sun. Further still, I can see something that is not there at all. A line of something, I cannot explain, but it's there, in the west. It feels like home, like something waiting for me. It feels both joyous and sad. I think it's something like the Holy Spirit, but I don't know. I'm not religious.
In the woods
I am not a vagina
There's more to me
More even than breasts, I mean
I am made of bone
and blood
My body is strong and
can take me long distances
up mountains
across lakes.
it loves the sun
and loves the mornings
dimples the wind
hates the cold
cries sometimes.
My body is not yours.
And I don’t give you permission
to touch it
or imagine it
or tell it where to have hair
or identify its “best feature”
I wish you could see me out here.

I wish you could watch me
swim
dance
run
sunbathe.
Out here, I slowly come undone
I unlearn how to think
Untangle myself from my insecurities
Unwrite the script
Undress myself
Shedding lies like socks.
And yeah, my feet have blisters
But they’ll heal.
Do you know what 4 am sounds like?
smells like?
looks like?
feels like?
can be like?
Because until you do, and know why
I love it.
As with most Landsea stories, this tale should be told beside a cheery and crackling fire, with a hot mug of GFS chocolate pressed tightly between weathered hands. Stories about being cold and wet are best repeated when warm and dry.

We were warm and dry. It was a crisp Canadian evening and D Patrol sprawled across a soft bed of pine needles, eating an enormous meal of scrambled eggs, fried sausage, and— I’m not making this up— blueberry pancakes with a reduction sauce. As the sun waded slowly through the sky, the air was almost syrupy with affection. We entered one of those planned, poetic silences that even sarcastic people adore when they become consumed by the great Landsea fuzzlust.

Someone suggested that we share “roses and thorns” from the day. And, as people broke into wandering narratives about the ephemeral wonder of the moment, we all slipped further into our pleasantly comatose daydreams. It was infectious. Life really felt that great.

Then, suddenly, we were brought back. Far across the lake and many, many miles beyond its shore, a streak of lightning flashed brightly. Someone exclaimed loudly. For ten minutes chatter filled the open woods as the ferocious storm moved across distant lakes and forest far to our left, bearing swiftly towards the far right of our sight line. But all the while, the wind under our trees came gently.

The lightning grew farther away, mostly hidden by dark, distant ridges. Chatter faded. And soon, it was my turn to speak. I paused a moment to capture the precise words perfectly. I found them and grinned like a crazy person, overcome with fuzzlust. I had no idea that I was about to utter one of the stupidest lines in Landsea history.

I sighed. “It’s like we’re inside, watching the nature channel,” I said in airy voice. I looked toward my co-leader and she smiled, knowingly. Everyone voiced their approval of my deep and thoughtful commentary.

But then, even as the words hung in the dry smoke above the fire, the wind hit like a paddle to the face. Forks, bowls, spoons, and pans detached themselves from the ground and clapped noisily over roots and rocks as they took the path of least resistance into the woods behind our camp. Seconds later, two participants were failing in their best “Iwo-Jima” impression to raise the collapsed alpine tarp. And as I struggled to open my eyes against the gusts, I could see the rain stabbing toward us across the water. We were about to get hammered by a storm-borne reality check.

When the downpour hit, some of the participants hadn’t even reached their raincoats. By the time we charged into the forest a minute later, the eye of the storm was less than three miles away. When we crested the hill and made a dash to lower ground, it was less than two. The forest had become a war zone and thunder rained down like howitzer shells. My co-leader and I yelled directions like battalion commanders. With lead-from-behind abandoned as a casualty, the patrol circled up and bunkered down.

When we finally returned to our campsite— almost one hour later— there was a ubiquitous feeling of relief. Participants shuttered and branches littered the ground. Backpacks sat like stones in shallow puddles. But little of the hollow, nervous chatter that often follows a near miss accompanied the debris. We knew we had been lucky and were grateful for it. There was nothing more to say.

We hugged one another and bedded under the tarp, a tacit understanding amongst us that our talk would mean more later. Someone read a story and participants fell asleep inside soaking sleeping bags.

The next morning we crossed the open water to our sister patrol’s camp in a reflective and personal silence. They too had endured. Somewhere along the way our tempest-tempered fuzzlust had become something more durable and solid— something that didn’t need to be expressed with a plethora of words or planned absence of the same. Was it fuzzlove? We paddled on.
On deck on the 0600-to-Noon watch. The wind was off our starboard quarter and we were running with a breeze of perhaps 8 knots. Little sea running as the waters were quite sheltered. Then, suddenly a wind shift and we jibbed. Or would have had there not been a preventer (the boom lashed to the port after mainstay). In this manner, the force of the backfilled mainsail and the resulting strain on the boom at the stay lashing point broke the boom. Yes, the 6 to 8 inch wooden boom had snapped as pretty as you please. The mainsail was lowered. Almost immediately I was assigned the helm and was on 010 and then 050 sailing with course, jibs, main staysail with the orders being, ‘full and bye’ as we eased into 050 thus gaining us the north side of Hayward Island. All hands, clean ship and breakfast now long past, it was decided to send a team ashore and find a tree suitable for making a new boom.

Playfair was anchored on the north side of Hayward Island and was deftly maneuvered to within a few feet of the rocky and tree-lined shore. Mate Clarkson and Professor Paul Alexia (biology) were sent ashore via the bowsprit with a clutch of tools, which included a dull, rusty, one-inch wood chisel and a claw hammer of normal proportions. They surveyed a number of trees and in time found one to their liking. Down it came, felled with the tools at hand. It was limbed and dragged to the shore. Somehow they set it to float and soon it was on our port side and hoisted aboard. We had a swim, and lunch which included hot cinnamon biscuits. Soon we cast off from the forest (we had secured some bowlines to stout trees). In as much as every sailor had a knife, it was then the crew’s job to debark the tree as step one in becoming a new boom.

In an hour or so, we had motored to Little Current, a small community on Manatulin Island. As we were in maneuvers for docking and throwing our heaving lines, Captain Fred inquired of an older gentleman as to whether he knew anyone with an adz (a steel bladed cutting tool attached to a long hickory handle that is used by swinging the blade toward the work and the shipwright), Fred stated that it was our intention to make a new boom from recently acquired timber. Much to the surprise of all, the man not only had an adz which he was eager to loan but he and Fred had several acquaintances in common. Mooring lines snug, gangway set, and Fred was off to borrow the adz. Meanwhile the timber had been off loaded onto the dock where the work room was generous.

The old fittings were removed from the boom, the sail having previously unlashed. The adz was especially useful in shaping the boom on the large end to receive the gooseneck fitting and on the other end the boom cap. In time these metal pieces were attached. Meanwhile I had a long talk with a First Nations man and later had a tour of the tugboat that was also moored to the same quay. An engine room tour was topped off with a pilothouse tour and a piece of pie at the mess table.

Evening was drawing nigh and we needed to move to pump out the sanitary tanks. That done, we soon found a beautiful safe anchorage at Bedford Island, anchored for the night, turned on the deck lights and attached the new boom and bent on the main sail. Sorry, no time for varnish, that would have to wait!
I got a beautiful spot near the water (which I am not to go near in my weakened state). Setting up my ground tarp was a confusing hassle with only 50 yards of one rope, but I made do. After last night, I’m not taking any risks. It pitter-pattered last night, but today it’s blue skies and sunshine.

After so much wet, it’s amazing to dry everything out. It’s such a sunny day with the light hitting me and the water, it’s amazing to think only yesterday we were checking for a sliver in the clouds.

I slept in this morning. After getting up consistently at 6, just rolling over felt amazing. It’s annoying when people check in. Silence and thoughts feel nice. Time for me. It’s what I said I wanted from college, and I’m definitely getting that now, and it feels amazing.

Time for forbidden thoughts, and time to realize that I’m a good person to spend time with. Time to realize I’ve grown older and have begun to develop a more independent self. All time to realize it’s my time.

I do miss the songs though. My troupe is a musical troupe. We are loud and proud and love singing, off key. I now know I should catch up my journal, but there’s a part of me that wants to move on from the past. So it’s somewhere around 7 or 8 (guesstimate) … yet it feels lovely, the sun just dipped behind the treeline, and I just had my nightly check-in. I got more water. There is still not a cloud in the sky but I exchanged my hiking suit for fleece pants, a sports bra, and my grey/blue striped shirt that is finally dry. My boots are almost dry, the insides are still a bit damp. It’s getting chilly, so I’ll be nice to snuggle into my sleeping bag. I’m running out of time to write in my journal.

This morning I woke up to Sara and Xavier traveling to pick up their first person. I had been laying still watching all the little movements like birds and chipmunks. We got back and there was soup made by our leaders, and we managed to demolish the equivalent of another bear bag. Nom. Nom. Nom.
Recipe
1) Crush the Ritz crackers with your hands, pour into a bowl
2) Mix water and eggs until slightly thinner than pancake batter in other bowl
3) Heat frying pan and add Parkay
4) Dip a stick of cheese in beaten eggs
5) Coat the battered stick of cheese with Ritz crackers
6) Fry the battered cheese stick on the pan until golden brown
7) Eat!

Ingredients
1 pack Ritz crackers
1 block mozzarella cheese, cut in strips
4 palm-fulls of dehydrated eggs
Water
Parkay

Hardware
Frying pan
Two bowls
Spatula

Mozzarella Sticks | Vinay Sharma '12
When “wilderness” and “nature” come to mind, one likely imagines magnificent mountains, rising from a misty valley and thrusting their tree-spires toward tumbling clouds. A Colorado family visiting the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park expects to be awe-struck by geologic wonders plunging to incredible depths, and a Kentucky couple assumes to be enlightened by existential subterranean experiences in Mammoth Cave National Park. The United States’ National Parks system provides distinct physical spaces that allow visitors to experience scene places seemingly existing beyond the man-made world of city scapes and farmland—they are the nation’s ‘Wonderlands.’ Here, in these wilderness spaces, man can enter nature, stepping over a dividing line between society and something else. By establishing distinct wilderness areas, the National Parks system constructs how U.S. Americans think of nature, privileging the separateness of a redwood forest over the willow tree gracing Wichita’s city hall. A nearly ubiquitous dichotomy between nature and culture dominates human relationships with the environment.

In “The Trouble with Wilderness,” William Cronon argues that “we mistake ourselves when we suppose that wilderness can be the solution to our culture’s problematic relationships with the nonhuman world,” because wilderness itself “is a profoundly human creation.” In particular, the history of the National Parks system and U.S. expansionism has contributed substantially to the construction of nature and wilderness underpinning U.S. national identity. The pervasiveness of Romanticism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century intellectualism, the frontier myth, and the conflict between preservationism and conservationism in the twentieth century has appreciably impacted current conceptions of nature and wilderness, most significantly because they are intimately tied to the development of the National Parks. The Parks themselves, in fact, have been crucial as a vehicle for U.S. Americans' experience of nature, such that designated geographic areas like the Parks are socially-produced wilderness places that perpetuate normative ways of understanding and experiencing nature. Wilderness and nature in the U.S. social imaginary, therefore, must be understood as self-reinforcing throughout history, and overly simplistic. By virtue of U.S. history, nature and wilderness become laden with myth and meaning that reinforce each other due to their animistic connection with physical space. In attaching and entrenching meaning to space, conceptions of nature and wilderness in the U.S. have socially produced wilderness, but the ubiquity of these conceptions also renders them socially reproductive. Deconstruction allows the relationship between humans and nature to be situated in a larger global context that embraces multiple human-environment experiences rather than perpetuating the irresponsible separation of humans from nature.

Although I believe that it is necessary to deconstruct simplistic or dualistic meanings assigned to nature, and therefore see it as a cultural product and a social construction, of equal importance remains the physical space itself. Nature constitutes a rare and valuable subject of study, for it concerns specific, identifiable, and most importantly, tangible, realities, rather than purely social, nebulous phenomena common to much social study. As such, instead of deconstructing nature through academic study, “[t]he point is to learn from nature, to enter into its spirit, and to stop trying to impose upon it the arbitrary constraints which result from our belief in our own importance.” I heartily believe it is necessary to understand nature within cultural discourse, because otherwise we run the risk of separating ourselves from nature by discounting its cultural values. However, treating nature only as a discursive fallacy, a cultural and social product, simultaneously ignores ecological realities. If we assume that National Parks are symbols of nature only because we humanly perceive them as such, we allow these places “no intrinsic merit, no value and no rights.” I do not believe, then, that natural spaces have no value simply because they are socially constructed. However, only when we realize our own anthropocentrism, and the ways in which we have constructed nature throughout United States history, can we become environmentally responsible. I want to “[d]ebate ‘Nature’ in order to defend nature.” Wilderness is a crucial component of U.S. American identity, understanding why, and then accordingly behaving in an environmentally responsible way, must occur if we want wilderness to continue to support U.S. identity, or to exist at all. We would do well to heed Roderick Frazier Nash’s admonishment that “wilderness is in danger of being loved to death.”
LandSea Journal Entry

Kelsey Gordon

I started noticing today that Felicia’s face looks different than usual. At first, I thought it appeared different because I was still getting to know her, but then I realized it has something to do with her mood. When Felicia is confident and comfortable she looks tall and composed. Her face is long and slender, and her eyes slink softly down her face. She holds her chin high—you can see it project in an upward angle towards the heads that hover over her own. Her hands rest against her sides, and her nose appears strong and slender.

When something is creeping up inside her, her entire body recomposes itself, reconfiguring in the shape of how I’d imagine a middle aged Russian gossip living in a small town of around 200 people. I think of the Matchmaker from Fiddler on the Roof when I look at her now.

She’s been smiling constantly, and her two top teeth—long and slender like a rat’s—have been resting slightly over her upper lip. Her cheeks have balled up and rounded. Her chin falls into her face, and a slight pouch of skin forms beneath her eyes. Her cheeks rise up against the sockets.
Killarney (top-left) | Adirondacks (bottom-left) | Killarney (right)
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish you a safe and exciting time on your next adventure in the outdoors. It is my only wish that having seen these photos and read these stories, you find yourself a couple days later among the trees, stars, and lands afar. I hope these embers have shown you the diverse beauty Mother Nature offers and makes you want to explore the crevices of the Rockies, sleep in the secret gardens of the Adirondacks, and stare at the stars for hours atop the Smokies. The outdoors can be a place of struggle, but nature rewards us with breathtaking wonder. The quaint poppy or the magnificent lonely mountain, it only takes a couple steps and a keen curiosity to replace pain and anguish with silence and awe.

Before you flip back through and look at all these pictures again, several thanks are in order. First and foremost, I would like to thank Lisa Darling for her graphic design instruction and her feedback regarding *Embers* as it evolved from an idea to a publication. With her assistance I was able to do everything I set out to do from the start. Secondly, I want to thank Jorich for his consistent support throughout this project. Our several meetings were crucial in directing this project and his coordination with the College was vital to the success of *Embers*. Additionally, I want to thank all the people who submitted a photo or short story to *Embers*; without their help this project would be nowhere. I also want to thank the donors and sponsors for their support of *Embers*. I would like to thank the people who have been part of Landsea and KOC programs for the past forty years. Without your curiosity to explore the wilderness, who knows what would have become of the wilderness programs here at Kalamazoo College. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their support and affection.

Also, please remember *Embers* is a student–driven publication. The success of future issues depends on your support and willingness to share your experiences with the Kalamazoo College community. If you are interested in submitting either photos or stories for consideration in future issues of *Embers*, please e-mail your pieces to the Outdoor Programs office.

Vinay Sharma
Executive Editor

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*I linger* Anonmyous

mmhhmmm
i want to linger
mmnhm
a little longer
mmhhmm
a little longer here with you

mmhhmm
it's such a perfect night
mmnhm
it doesn't seem quite right
mmnhm
that it should be
my last with you

mmhhmm
and come September
mmnhm
i will remember
mmnhm
camping days and friendships true

mmnhm
and as the years go by
mmnhm
i'll think of you and sigh
mmnhm
this is goodnight
mmnhm
and not good-bye
mmnhm
this is goodnight
mmnhm
and not good-bye

Killarney Lilian Anderson Arboretum