

May 20, 2009

Dear Mat-Su Schools Foundation,

Wow! What an adventure we had on our May 18-19, 2009 Seward Field Trip! The weather couldn't have been more perfect and the adult-student ratio was ideal—14 adults to 26 students!

Our 4 1/2 hour train trip from Anchorage to Seward received outstanding reviews from some of our students. Corina said, "The train trip was much more fun than driving in a car!" They loved exploring the dome car, standing between the cars breathing in the invigorating air and seeing the breathtaking views around every corner. We followed our route on map, read about the railroad history and listened to the commentator teach about our fascinating Alaska history.

We headed out to Exit Glacier as soon as we arrived in Seward, ate lunch, and our next four hours were spent hiking all around the glacier. Our guides were very thorough in their explanations of what we were experiencing. Some student quotes include Logan and Jeremy, "We hiked in the sun and got to touch the glacier." Evnica was amazed at "how glaciers have moved throughout history."

We moved into the Sea Life Center at 5:00 and began our evening of a scavenger hunt, dinner and two classes—one on cephalopods and the other on bioluminescence! Victoria exclaimed, "It was great wandering around viewing the exhibits." Ben thought, "Getting to touch the anemones in the touch tank at the Discovery Pool" was pretty awesome. Bethany said, "Touching the sea stars in the touch tank was much better than reading about them in a book!" Cherie was amused at "the energetic harbor seal who looked at me through the glass." Josh laughed after observing "two crabs poking each other." Autumn was intrigued with the bird exhibit where we classified flying and diving birds. Sleeping overnight on the floor between the bird exhibit and harbor seals was a marvelous once-in-a-lifetime occasion!

The bioluminescent class taught about little critters that had special chemicals that would glow in the midnight zone--the deepest, darkest depths of the ocean. Robert remarked on "the fireflies that became bioluminescent after being crushed and had water added." He also

remembered that this mixture was a Japanese emergency light source. Josh and Dawson and many others enjoyed "playing the game in the dark where you had to find your bioluminescent mate!"

Our class on cephalopods—creatures with a head and 8 arms—included dissecting squids! Kea thought it was a great way to learn about these creatures in this hands-on way.

Our second day was another gorgeous blue-skied day! We cruised Resurrection Bay with Kenai Fjords Tours for 5 hours soaking up wind and sun and unbelievable views. We were not disappointed! The sea mammals and birds showed off profusely. Morgan B. noticed "docks used in WWII still lining the Resurrection Bay shoreline." "The playful dall porpoises that swam alongside our boat" amused Hannah. Bailey felt "very peaceful when we all quietly watched the orcas surface and dive from a distance." Morgan C. loved "viewing the sea mammals and birds in their natural habitat". "Cruising through the little islands and viewing the sea star in the wild" was Lacy's idea of a neat time, and Leya was thrilled to observe the cute behavior of the sea otters.

We attended four classes aboard the Marine Science Explorer: Water Analysis (experimenting with the salinity of water), Defining the Resurrection Bay deep-water fjord estuary ecosystem, the study of seabird and marine mammal adaptations, and using microscopes to study plankton and zooplankton. Cherish remembered that "80% of our air comes from phytoplankton. That's why we need to take care of the sea!"

Before we headed home aboard the train we perused the little shops, ate ice cream and lazed in the sun some more. Suffice it to say, we could not be more appreciative of the part you played in helping us to experience this dream of a lifetime! The adventure, the bonding of friends, the rich learning environment, the weather was out of this world! We thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Sincerely,

Lynda Chud and Jana DePriest
4/5 multiage teachers at Shaw Elementary School