

Proposal #563

Sponsors: Don Rodriguez
Dan Wakelee

Programs: Environmental Science & Resource Management
Political Science

Activity Title: National Park Field Experience

Dates of Activity: November 15-17, 2013*

Activity Description:

This activity involved travel to Yosemite National Park as part of the interdisciplinary ESRM/POLS 341 course, the National Park. This trip provided an opportunity for students to experience one of the nation's great resource parks while integrating content from course readings and lectures about parks and their operations.

The group stayed at the NatureBridge environmental education facility located at Crane Flat in Yosemite National Park. NatureBridge staff provided orientation to the park and lead hikes in Yosemite Valley. Students spent the day Saturday and Sunday morning meeting with park officials.

During the visit students met with and participated in discussions with:

- Park Superintendent Don Neubacher concerning the Park Service and park management issues Deputy Chief of Interpretation Paul Ollig discussing climate change with park visitors
- Branch Chief of Physical Science Joe Meyer concerning fire management in the park
- Branch Chief of Wilderness Management Ed Dunleavy about managing visitors on Half Dome
- Ryan Leahy from the Bear Team demonstrating techniques for tracking bears and bear management in the park
- Park Museum Curator Phil Johnson talked about the history and experience of native people in Yosemite
- District Ranger Jack Hoeflich describing a typical day of a law enforcement ranger and
- Interpretive Ranger and author Shelton Johnson delivered his nationally recognized living history presentation on Buffalo Soldiers and talked about engaging underrepresented visitors in national parks

Relationship to course and learning objectives:

Students incorporating the information and experiences from the Yosemite visit into their final culminating projects for the course. Student culminating projects were designed to engage college students with national parks and to present them in ways that make them relevant to groups which tend to have low park visitation rates. As part of these projects students gathered information from and made presentations to several student groups on the CI campus. These projects were also shared with the National Park Service for consideration as part of their efforts to diversify the population of park visitors and improve their outreach to college students.

Strengths of Activity:

The students who participated in the Yosemite activity consistently reported that, while they gained an understanding of concepts and issues related to managing and protecting public lands from the in-class activities of the course, the visit made these concepts real for them. (Excerpts of student journal comments are included in the student response section below.) For many students this was their first visit to a national park. Students reported that this experience enabled them to be better ambassadors for parks. Some students reported an interest in changing their career objectives as a direct result of the trip.

Weaknesses of Activity:

The trip to Yosemite was originally scheduled to take place on October 18 to 20. Unfortunately federal facilities, including Yosemite and all national parks, were closed during this time due to the federal budget impasse. Students were advised at the start of the term that they needed to be available to participate in the Yosemite trip on those dates. When the federal shutdown occurred it was unclear whether it would be possible to offer this activity to students at all. Ultimately it was possible to reschedule the activity for November 15 to 17, however this change had several negative impacts.

The one item identified by students that was not related to the changes in schedule due to the federal government shutdown was the limited amount of time actually spent in the park. Travel to and from Yosemite via bus required the majority of the day on both Friday and Sunday. Some students expressed that too much content was presented in a concentrated period of time in the park while they had very limited time to observe and gain a sense of the natural resources within the park.

Improvements for Future Activities:

The greatest issues with this activity were related to the shut down of the federal government and closure of Yosemite National Park. This was beyond the control of all involved.

In response to student concerns about the lack of opportunity to experience natural resources in the park we will explore the possibility of adding an additional day to the activity. This will however have to be balanced against the additional cost associated with a longer trip.

Student Responses to the Activity: (the following are excerpts from student reflections on the Yosemite experience)

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My experience was beyond amazing. Yosemite allowed me to best understand this class and most importantly the importance of National Parks in this country. I did not grow up in the outdoor camping life, I grew up in the city, where outdoor life was dreaded. Also, I would like to add, it was not part of my culture. My family didn't do it, and my friends didn't do it. Growing up however, and moving outside of the city I realized what outdoors and the natural environment has to offer through friends who did do things such as camping and the such. I absolutely loved and never really wondered why I never saw it before, until now. I am astounded by nature and its mind blowing how I never saw it before. It is a shame that not too many people I know have ever heard about National Parks, especially living in this state where there are several National Parks we could visit.

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The most significant part of this experience was Shelton Johnson's presentation. I have never experienced a performance quite like that before. Shelton's dedication to Yosemite and the buffalo soldier story was really impressive. For the park to become engrained in someone to that extent makes you appreciate the park on a deeper level. The performance really gave meaning to the idea that parks are more than recreation and beautiful scenery. After experiencing his presentation I can honestly say that history does have an impact on my enjoyment of National Parks.

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I feel that a deeper understanding of Interpretation is the aspect that I took away from this trip. Prior to this trip I did not place much importance on interpretation in parks, I felt like it actually took away from the wildness of the park. Now I realize that interpretation can actually help connect with National Parks on a deeper level than you could on your own in some cases. A change that I would suggest is to maybe add one day to the trip that allows for a hike or a tour of the park. I think this would complete the trip, being educated on park issues, then actually going out and seeing the park. I feel that there was not enough time to see the park on our trip. Other than that I feel like the trip was great the presenters, Nature Bridge site and staff really made the trip a good experience.

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The most significant part of this experience was to see Yosemite for the first time. No matter how many pictures you take of Yosemite or how many times you hear about the great individuals that helped to protect it, there will never be anything quite like experiencing Yosemite in person. As a scientist, I really enjoyed waking up early to experience the natural surroundings Yosemite has to offer. To see phenomenon like high alpine meadows and fog banks that would roll in and blanket these areas was a very magical experience. The early morning the fog would recede and all the flora would be covered in a layer of ice. I also enjoyed seeing the diverse variety of conifers and to experience trees several hundred to thousands of years old is like experiencing a time long since gone. I felt primal, natural and humbled by this experience. The valley also blew my mind. I still find it hard to believe Yosemite exists as

everywhere you look is like seeing heaven on Earth. Towering walls that bring you back to what really matters in life, humility.

To improve this class trip I would recommend a little more time to experience the wild side of Yosemite with more hikes or possibly a trip up to Yosemite falls. I would also like to see multiple class trips. Maybe one to Channel Islands and one to Yosemite. It would be interesting to hear the talks from different rangers at different parks and see the challenges each park faces and how each different ranger solves those issues while still upholding the Organic Act.

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For me the greatest part was being able to go to a place that we have all talked about in class. Taking part in the park activity scene and first hand being there instead of just reading about it and all the great and beautiful things one could do. Being able to interact with rangers and to get their first hand opinions of the park was enlightening in just how passionate they are about their park. Another great experience was having to bunk with your class mates, I honestly felt that we have all bonded a little more after this trip. I would have really liked to stay for a week to get the full Yosemite experience.

Having gone to Yosemite every summer for the past 16 years, it was definitely not my first time seeing the beauty of the area and the resources, however, this experience of going with a classmates and professors, and staying in the barracks with the campfires every night was an experience I will never forget. I was so cool to see the transformation of the chemistry of the class as well. We all seemed to get closer and form a nice bond. It is hard to choose a favorite part, however one moment that stands out in my mind is the experience from Mr. Johnson. His recreation of his character and the place that he took us imaginarily was incredible. I will always remember that opportunity that we had in listening to him speak, especially in the setting we were in. One thing I would maybe change would just be the amount of time actually out and hiking and experiencing the natural beauty of it all. I remember a good amount of time in lecture halls with slide shows while I am wondering what more is outside.

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My overall experience of this trip was great. The most significant part of the trip for me was the nature hike. I believe that being outside in the park will teach us more about nature then we could ever learn inside the classroom, especially when you have a guide that's pointing out and explaining things along the way. I enjoyed learning about the strategies and management of the park but I was rather bothered by the fact that we were contained inside a building while sitting in the middle of the Yosemite Valley. Sunday was not as bad as Saturday but it was discouraging to know we traveled all that way to sit in a cold room. Most of what we learned that day could have been discussed at Channel Islands. I would have liked to visit Glacier Point as well as the Giant Sequoia trees. We only got to see a fraction of Yosemite. All in all I'm happy to see opportunities like this trip being available to the students. It amazes me that we have this amazing place in our backyard yet many people still haven't been there.

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I loved the Yosemite trip!!!!!! It was so much fun and I enjoyed being able to get to know my classmates better. There are many things that were the most significant to me. Going on those night hikes with my classmates were some of the best experiences I have ever had. Being able to just walk around the forest with no light except that of the moon, hearing animals move

in the distance, climbing trees, and sharing laughs was all so amazing. Also, slept outside under the stars for the first time in my life and it was so great, even though I was woke once an hour by loud cracks from tree branches being stepped on by animals. Just the experience as a whole was absolutely amazing and I can't wait to go back soon. Something I would suggest for the future maybe just lessen the number of lectures, or at least the number of lectures that take place inside the auditorium. If the lectures were given while on a hike I feel people would enjoy them more. Also, that guided hike should be taken out and the free time that there is should just be free time so that way people can see what they wish to see. Last, try to have the trip as early as possible because it is very helpful for the final project.

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I loved the trip to Yosemite; my only problem with the trip was that we did not stay long enough. I enjoyed learning about fire and bear management in the park as well as search and rescue. The information given during these presentations was extremely informative, showing us the variety of work within the National Parks as well as the tough job of a Park Ranger. I also really liked learning about the indigenous people and their culture, walking through the village really gave me insight into the lives of the Native American people. Shelton Johnson's representation of the Buffalo Solider was another great presentation that informed us on the culture and history of Yosemite National Park. Yet above all I enjoyed just being out in nature, away from the destructive hand of man. From watching the sunrise, to going on hikes through the forest, every aspect of Yosemite was absolutely breathtaking. The trip was also a bonding experience, on the bus to Yosemite I only knew a handful of the students in the class and by the time we were on our way home I had made many new friends. My only suggestion would be to make the trip longer, possible set aside a whole day to go hiking and explore the natural beauty of Yosemite.

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The Yosemite experience was amazing! It was the first time I had ever gone to a national park and I hope to continue going in the future provided I have the funding. The most significant part of the trip was meeting Shelton Johnson. I was amazed at how well into character he was and how well he played the flute! I love music so that was very intriguing to me. I like the idea of the story that he promotes and how someone came from such a negative place, but had the strength to turn it into something positive through the beauty of the environment. I loved the story so much because it correlates with my own. His story also shows that the generic national park pamphlets aren't necessarily true and that the national parks is a place for people of different races, colors, age, and size, which allows the parks to have a bigger "audience" so to speak. If there was anything I would suggest it would be having all organic food, which I know would be extremely difficult.

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The most significant experience in Yosemite was being able to meet people who had jobs within the Park. Our trip covered a lot of different areas and responsibilities that these individuals are hired to do. I thought this was very insightful to see. It made me realize that there are plenty of opportunities within the park for different roles. I had no real suggestions regarding the trip besides that I wish I had more time to solidify a date for the weekend, although I know that this was not under the power of any individual.

...The most significant part of the trip for me was definitely the time we spent with Shelton Johnson. At first it was the most uncomfortable aspect of the trip but quickly became the most memorable. I found it amazing the way he was able to pull people in and just when he felt he

was losing someone he grabbed their attention again and was off telling another story that we could all connect to. Also I found it super creative the way he portrayed his message by becoming this character. This allowed anyone of any color or background to connect with this story. Anyone can say that the National Parks are open to everyone but the history and passion of the story Shelton is telling makes the story much more meaningful. The situation in National Parks is sad. It is sad that people of certain races don't feel that the parks are for them, because everyone should be able to experience a park like Yosemite. I learned a lot about interpretation from the park rangers and especially Shelton. I think it is important to come up with creative and inspiring ways to connect to visitors so that they might become interested in being stewards of the parks. The only suggestion, which I know has already been suggested is that this trip be scheduled closer to the start of the semester, so that these really creative ideas might be able to be portrayed in our final projects. I also feel that if the class had the chance to get to know each other earlier that it would make for a better open enthusiastic semester.

...Yosemite was a very valuable experience for me. I really enjoyed all three of the presentations on Sunday as well as the bear manager's presentation on Saturday. I liked learning about the history of the native Indians as well as the history of the Buffalo soldiers in the park. Both of those presentations were really interesting to me because I never thought about the history of Yosemite. Before this trip when I would think about Yosemite I would just think about the majestic beauty, now I think about the history as well. I liked the bear manager's presentation because I knew the bears were a really big problem and it was cool to see their new approaches to handling the bear situations. My favorite part was the free time and night hikes. Exploring the wilderness was incredible especially under a full moon and it just felt really good being out in the wilderness and away from the everyday grind for a weekend. One improvement would be to have free time in the actual valley. The guided tour seemed geared towards elementary school kids and it would have been a lot better to just let the class explore the valley on their own. Other than that it was a great trip and I'm really glad I got such a valuable experience. I now understand the importance of our national parks as well as the complexity of running a national park. ...The most significant part of this experience for me was during the time spent with Shelton Johnson. His way of describing this story of the Buffalo Soldiers and the history and involvement in the national parks. What impacted me most about his narrative to us is when he described what it felt like to be nobody. The body language, the posture, the broken spirit, I related to that feeling because I often feel like that the hour after chemistry class. After listening to him describe what it felt like to stand tall, have attitude and "be somebody" I resolved to never hold myself like a "nobody". This takeaway may not be relevant to other parks but it's what impacted me the deepest about the entire trip. Being at Yosemite itself was a cathartic, healing experience.

...The most significant part of the Yosemite trip for me was seeing the park in person. I really enjoyed exploring the park and hiking with the class as well as in smaller groups during free time. The other part of the trip that I really enjoyed was hearing from all the different rangers in the park, which really gave me a multi-aspect view on park management from culture to safety. If I could change one thing about the trip I would make it longer. I know that is not really possible but after leaving the park I was thinking the whole way home I would really like to go back for a week trip.

...The most significant part of my experience in Yosemite was when we got to see all of the major sites. When we first got to see Half Dome and most of the park I was amazed at the

beauty and how momentous Yosemite really is. I thought it was amazing how little of the park was developed; I assumed there were more campsites or places to stay when really it is just in the valley. My favorite activity that we did was the night hikes. I have never gone on a night hike and Yosemite was an amazing place for it; we explored the forest for hours in the cold. I didn't even notice how cold it was because the view was so beautiful and hiking is a lot of work. On the first night I went with a group hiking the edge of where the fire was and on the second night I went with a smaller group to the meadow and then through a small forest to a hidden meadow covered in frost which was awesome.

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Having only been to parks under supervision when I was really young, this was a unique experience to wander Yosemite with classmates. While the lectures we listened to in the park were very informative, the only thing I would change about the visit for future classes would be to have the lectures either shorter or done before or after the trip. I think most of the day spent listening to someone talk about Yosemite really took away from getting to experience the park first hand by walking around and seeing it for ourselves. More tours of the park or free time to explore it for most of the weekend would have been way more beneficial than listening to someone talk about it and only walking around supervised for only two hours of the whole weekend.

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My experience in Yosemite was both awe-inspiring and eye-opening. To talk about the parks in class is one thing, but to visit and experience a park in its entirety is a different matter altogether. Seeing how dedicated the rangers were to their job provided for an uplifting environment and made me respect the area was in even more so. Learning about the ecology and history of the area, also emphasized, in my opinion, how important it was to keep not only Yosemite, but all parks running and operational. The services provided for us allowed us to leave home, without making us feel entirely out of place. This trip also increased the friendly dynamic between all of us and I enjoyed learning from my fellow classmates as well as the Rangers. The part of the trip I would suggest changing would be the long hours we spent in the lecture forums. I feel that that time could be better spent either exploring the Park, or having the lecturers teach outside of the forum in order for the class to feel more enveloped in the lecture. Other than that recommendation, the trip in my opinion was a success and provided me with more incentive to want to assist the National Parks in any way possible.

My point is that, I am part of that other half of the population that has not been exposed to the natural life due to culture. I am Hispanic and my friends and family are Hispanic, and for some reason that I have yet to understand, it simply does not seem to be part of our culture. However, after visiting Yosemite and experiencing something that seemed unreal but yet so engaging and simply nature at its best. I have realized it is unfair that this side of our history has been almost hidden from me. And because of it, I have made sure to let it be known to those close to me that I am sure have all never been, to show them what we are lucky to have and I am sure they will also be able to appreciate nature at its best. In doing so, it creates awareness for not only our National Parks but for nature in general.

That brings me to my next point, one of my favorite part of the trip was the importance given to the environment. It was scary to hear that the park might not exist for future generations due to global warming. And at the same it made me sad because this current generation still has not

been able to enjoy what parks like Yosemite have to offer, not because of the effects of global warming but simply ignorance of its existence. However, like myself, I do believe that by experiencing firsthand its beauty it will make many more appreciate the environment and change their ways to preserve the National Parks or the likes. I know I will definitely make the best effort to become green friendly and do as much as possible to help in any way I can. I do not suggest anything for this class, only to make more trips like this accessible and possible for many more CI students to enjoy.

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I had an overall fun experience in Yosemite during the National Parks Class field trip. The most significant experience for me was the night hikes, and also seeing the sunrise over the meadow both mornings. I had the most fun during the night hikes because they were not on a schedule, and there was no one telling me what I could and couldn't do. I enjoyed watching the sunrise both mornings because it was a very spiritual experience.

If I could plan this trip, I would allow the students to have more free time during the day in the valley. I would try and schedule lectures for early morning and late afternoon, with the daylight hours left mostly free for the students to experience the Valley. I WOULD ALLOW THE STUDENTS TO ROCK SCRAMBLE. I would NOT have the students follow a Nature Bridge chaperone on a one mile walk that takes four hours.

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The most significant part of the Yosemite trip for me, was when we broke off into groups and went separate ways with NatureBridge guides. More specifically, my group guide took us to hike the bottom part of the Falls, we saw the Spider Cave, Grandmother Rock, but my favorite was a spot called Little Meadow (I believe that was the name). This spot was absolutely breathtaking. As we came upon the meadow, my entire group sort of paused for a minute to take in the scene. What we did from this point on was, what our guide called a "serenity walk". We each lined up, and would count 30 seconds after the person in front of us began to walk, and each of us would follow, walking almost alone in the middle of this meadow.

Now do not get me wrong, I loved the entire trip, but this very moment was truly something special. There I stood in the middle of the meadow, grass up to my knees, spinning in a full circle in order to see everything: El Capitan, Half Dome, the Falls, the Cathedral, and even the Three Brothers. As I did this, all I could hear was the wind blowing through the grass, it was something else. The whole idea that man belongs out amongst nature is true. It is amazing how at ease this scene, and the natural sounds that come along with it, can make a person.

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To be honest, I thought that this trip was going to be just an extension of class, where we would be stuck inside being fed words, but it was not. With school coming to an end, and graduation on the brink (in 2 weeks!), this trip allowed me to come back to CI with a clear and refreshed mind. The only change that I can suggest for future classes would be to stay in Yosemite for a longer period of time, maybe a week. Other than that, thank you for making my first (and definitely not last) trip to Yosemite possible!

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My favorite parts of this Yosemite experience were engaging with Shelton Johnson and his Buffalo Soldier theatrical act. I loved learning about this type of interpretation and the cultural

experience that he provided us. I also thoroughly enjoyed the bear management spokesperson that we met with. I am interested in how they manage wildlife and what they do to keep visitors safe and how they manage to keep bears from becoming too friendly with campsites. I also loved hiking at night in the moonlight and exploring the beauties that Yosemite had to offer. Waking up early and watching the sun rise over the meadow was also quite an experience. The only change I would make to this trip would be to change the wilderness lecture to something slightly more captivating. My experiences in Yosemite made me truly thankful for the people who worked to set aside these parks so that my generation and future generations can enjoy the historical and natural beauties that grace this land.

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 My time in Yosemite was enlightening to say the very least. I had been there many times before as a spectator of the great views, but knew very little about the history and people involved in the park, past and present. Learning about the indigenous people that lived in the park and that they were forced out of their home at bayonet point, brought more reality to my view of this incredible place. Also learning about the tasks the rangers go through on a daily basis and all the problems associated with being an employee of the park was very interesting as well.

This trip was very informative and I got more out of it than I thought I would have. It would have been nice to spend more time outside of the class while on the trip. I feel that some of that information could have been talked about while being on a hike.

Summary of Expenses:

IRA Award	7,434.00
Lab Fee	3,910.00
Total Available	11,344.00

(After 8 students refunded)

IRA Spent	6,482.00
Lab Fee Spent	3,910.00
Total Spent	10,392.00

IRA	6,671.25	Naturebridge
	3,600.00	Bus
	(810.00)	Bus Discount
	324.00	Gratuity
	450.00	Driver Meals
	(2,056.00)	Naturebridge Refund
	236.00	Island Packers
	(1,933.25)	JET to Course Fee
Total Spent from IRA	6,482.00	

Attendee list and photographs are provided separately



Trip participants stayed at the NatureBridge facility at Crane Flat



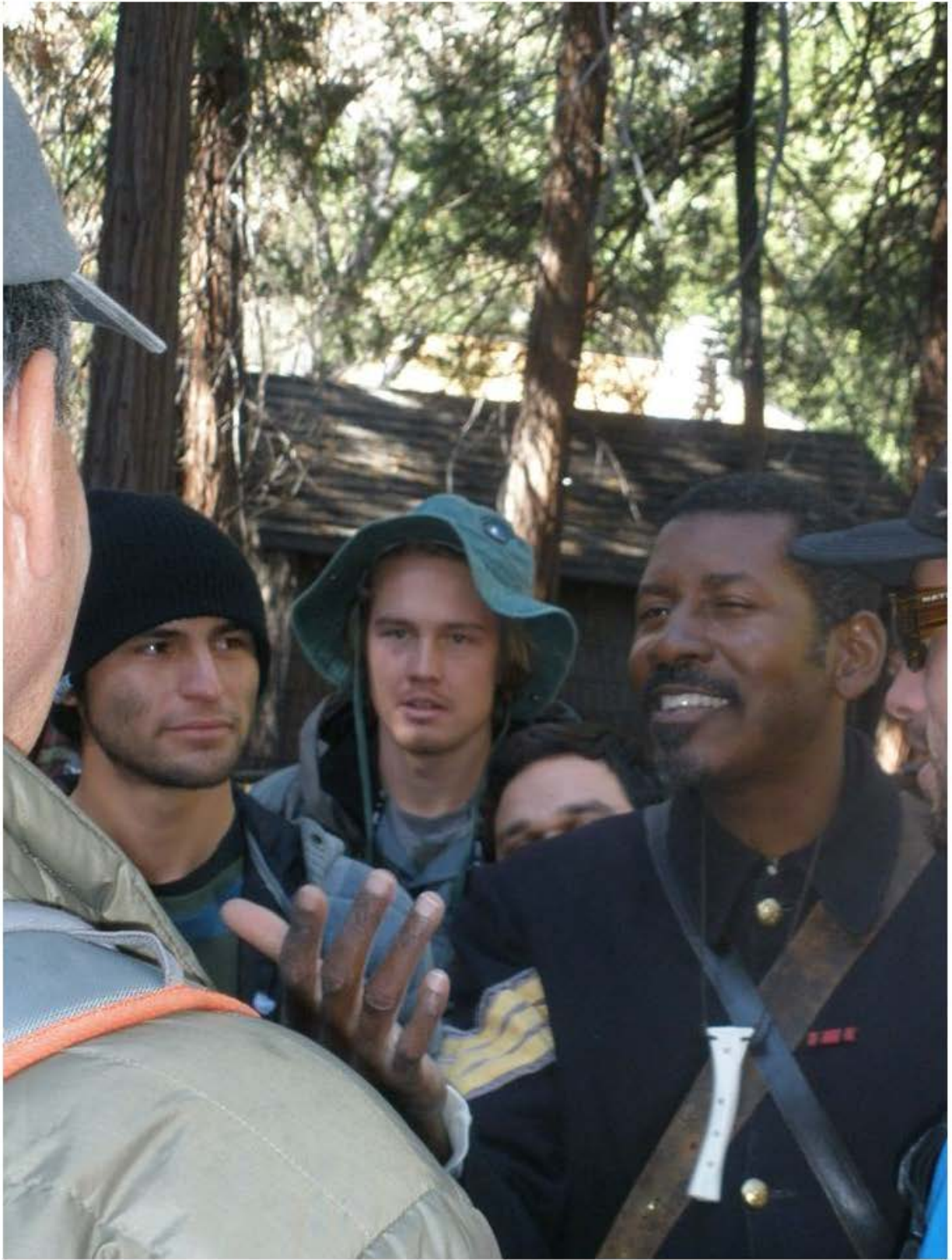
Phil Johnson, curator of the park museum, and Ahwahneechee descendant, talked with the group about the history of native people in the park



Trip participants at Tunnel View overlooking Yosemite Valley



Participants met with the park superintendent and other key park leaders



Shelton Johnson, who was featured in the Ken Burns series "The National Parks" gave participants a firsthand experience with living history