

Julia Spencer
Summer 2009
Indiana University Field Station
Cardwell, MT
Duration: 6 weeks
Prerequisites: Completed first two years of undergraduate study in geology.

I left Indiana's Field camp feeling like a competent field geologist. Indiana is all about learning it on your own and developing the confidence to make decisions in the field without the help of other students or professors. If you want to work on projects with partners Indiana would not be a good fit, however it really forces you to learn and make logical interpretations of what you see on the ground. I loved it.

The field station is in a beautiful location in the Tobacco Root Mountains off of I-90 between Butte and Bozeman. It is pretty remote and the field station has maintained a great relationship with landowners in the area and has access to a wide range of study areas. A typical day is wake up a 6:30 breakfast at 7:00 and leaving by 8:00 in the vehicles or on foot. Most days you don't drive more than half an hour to your field location and get to spend usually from around 8:30-4:00 hiking around and mapping on topo maps and air photos. You get back to the field station around 5 or 6 take a shower, dinner at 7 and then work from after dinner till around 10 which is when the turn in deadline is.

It is constant work and physically demanding, but a lot of fun if you are into it. Each week we would be in a new mapping location and divided into three groups, one with each professor and two assistant instructors. The professors help you less and less as field camp goes on and grade on your independence. At the end of each week on Saturday you have an independent exercise, which is like a test. Saturday night is your night off and most everyone goes to the local bar in Whitehall. It is a lot of fun and they provide dance lessons one night and live music on other nights and very cheap beer, there is also a movie theatre and a bowling ally. Sundays are a free day and you can do just about whatever you wan as long as you're back at the field station by 4:00. There is not drinking at the field station, which some people found annoying, but there was really no time for it anyway and Saturday night was plenty for most people.

The 6 weeks ends with your final study area, which is a weeklong independent mapping project. I had a great time doing my final study and if you work hard you come up with a map and cross section that are truly your own interpretation. Indiana is a lot of work but you spend most of hiking around beautiful country and get to be outside every day for 6 weeks. Don't be discouraged by your grades on assignments, particularly in the beginning. The professors really pay attention to your field ethic, attitude, independence, and improvement. I had a great time and met some great people. I would highly recommend this field camp to any Whitman geology student who is willing to work hard and wants to be outside in a beautiful place for the summer.