

Stanislaus Crew: Owen Ridings

When was the last time you were faced with a challenge in which you truly doubted your abilities? In fact, when was the last time you truly sought out an instance that you knew might cause you to fail? It is much more common in the present age that we would turn a feat of great skill or a challenge faced into a question of practice. We stand safely out of harms' way, all the while commenting how easily such and such could be completed if only one were to practice. And what a laughable fallacy this is. Truth be told, we as a society have come to fear failure. Rather than chance defeat we are content to reside in mediocrity whilst we think action to death.

No longer do our heroes of yesterday inspire us. No, now they are nothing more than a painful reminder of our inability to achieve greatness. Generation after generation it has become more acceptable to simply "get by", and year after year we have watched the American society plummet in the world rankings in Math, Science, and college graduation rates. One can be sure that if a change is not made this downward trend will only continue. How then do we overcome our fears of failure which cause us to accept mediocrity, and once again reach the magnificent heights of achievement that our forefathers were so well acquainted with?

I for one believe that the change must start with the youth of any society. There has to be a drastic change in mentality and their overall perceptions about what they are capable of accomplishing. One way to change their perceptions is to offer b\opportunities in which they are challenged in a multitude of ways so that strengths can be discovered and weaknesses can be improved upon.

The California Conservation Corps Backcountry Trails Program is such a program. Every day brings about new challenges and obstacles to overcome. And with each new challenge comes an opportunity to learn something about yourself. There have been times when after hiking 16 miles with tools and a backpack that I didn't think my legs would go any further. There have been peaks that towered menacingly above my head that I didn't think it was possible to reach the top. But time and time again with the support of others I've found ways to overcome what I was afraid I might not be able to do.

Since being in the Backcountry I have learned that my limitations are set out of fear and once I conquered that fear anything was possible. I learned that pain is temporary and that the great joy in life would not be as wonderful without it. I've also found that it is in the times of chaos and discomfort that we learn the precious secrets of life. But most importantly was learning that each and every person is capable of far more than they ever thought possible. All it takes is a desire to succeed and an acceptance of failure as one of the greatest teachers in life rather than being an insurmountable obstacle.

It is difficult to believe that 5 months have passed since starting the Backcountry Program and soon I will be re-joining society. The individual who started the season was lost some time ago now. The one present has nothing but love in his heart and a desire to change the world for the better. I sincerely hope that this program continues for decades to come because of the profound impact it has had on my life. I have discovered more about myself in five months than in the 24 years prior and can only hope that many more young individuals have a chance to learn all of the important lessons the Backcountry

has to offer. The future of this nation depends on rising above the challenges ahead and I can think of no better preparation than in the Backcountry.