Summer Blast!

Campebiil 2021

Lifetime memories

Summers at Ebiil are an awesome memory maker for kids of all ages, including parents! Summer 2021 was a blast of summer excursions beginning with Campebiil at Helen Reef and Tobi, followed by Decolonizing Research class throughout Palau, and two traditional camps at Ebiil campus. Campebiil travels throughout Palau to experience the natural beauty, mysteries, best secrets, and so much of what Palau has to offer.

Nature Love

This summer activities of learning and exploring traveled to Tobi- Helen Reef, Kayangel, Peleliu, Angaur, Ngardmau, and Ngarkeklau island of Ngarchelong. The young explorers got a chance to experience and learn our diverse forest habitats, snorkel our reefs from the mangrove to the lagoon, study endangered species of birds, watch turtles' nest and hatch, identify endangered plant species in the forest and why, go fish and tend to taro patches, study caves, and so much more! Better yet, camp-out with many friends old and new, and make wonderful lasting memories. This is where we create the next generation of nature lovers who will safeguard our home and its creatures large and small and make sure it stays beautiful as intended. *My Land, My Water, My Home, may I be as good and beautiful to you as you have always been to me… (Ebiil Camp moto 2005)*

Exploring plants and trees of Tobi

Observing seabird nesting

Tree Huggers

forest value in our lives

Campebiil always begins with studies on the land and move its way towards the ocean following Palauan protocol and work ethics. As such, we start our forest exploration, studying plants species and their ecosystem functions, cultural use, weather its native or endemic, or even invasive, find favorite plants, and develop love for the forest as we listen to its sounds, smell of its different fragrances, touch, smell and taste those edible plants used by hunters and medicinal healers. Visited forests include Ngardmau waterfall trail, Tobi, and Helen Reef, and Ngertebechel river. Trainers include Joyce Beouch, Vanray Tadao, and Mercy Beketaut.

Campers learn of the value of Palau's forest and its contribution to the global forest diversity, including threats to its health, such as wildfire, deforestation, and unsustainable development. They get explore degraded land areas contributed by such threats, compare them to healthy forests, and learn how to protect and restore native forests. They also learn of Medal lechad oral history and how that bare an important beginning of our water sources linked to important deity and gods who blessed us with their creation. Thus we must respect the water sources and not make loud noises or nuisance behavior that interferes with its peaceful environment and above all -use it with respect. Once we finish our experiential studies the campers get to plant trees to help restore life onto these degraded land areas. They plant native trees that will help create new forests and homes to animals and birds, and forest sources for local people to use to support their lives.

Finally, we never miss learning and exploring connected watersheds, swim, and frolic in the rivers, observe freshwater species of fish, snails, and shrimps and how everything is connected. Campers all together planted 800 trees between the different camps! That a ton of Earth healing from kids and youth! Five hundred of the plant were planted by the campers from Tobi who learned Helen Reef biodiversity and helped to restore the island forest and home to many sea birds nesting and residing in the area. Thank you Ngardmau and Tobi state for such amazing classrooms!

Ngarkeklau Campout!

Endangered species, archaeology & Coastal restoration

An all-time favorite is campout at Ngarkeklau Island! Where campers stay overnight on the island around campfires, making smores, telling stories, singing, and just having a blast! Here on the island is one of Ebiil's biggest outdoor classroom. Campers get to experience and learn about endangered species of ngasech sea turtles, and bekai Palauan megapode with Mr. Osu Eberdong and Ime Sato. Kids get to identify nests and measure them, see the turtle eggs, and learn of the species behavior and the threats to their survival that makes them endangered. Earlier that night the campers got to witness baby turtles hatch from their nest! "Wow, this is so cool that we get to see this," whispers one the campers. This is what makes all the hard work pay off when you hear children express such happiness.

Campers also get to explore the ancient village of Ngarkeklau, dating some 1000 years before. They then given investigation plans to explore the different historical remnants throughout the island and come back to share their findings with the rest of the camp. Some of their findings include the size of the bai and main structure materials, different types of pottery and tools sizes and designs, what they may have been used for, diangel or canoe house area and the connecting dock structural remains, sizes and types of materials used, individual residents area, pottery and tool sherds that may have been used by the residents, etc. A whole lot of exploring and endless learning!

At some point before the day ends, campers take part in planting trees to restore the coastline against tidal surge and coastal erosion. Here they learn about climate change and sea level rise, storms and surge, coastal erosion, and its impact on the plants and animals around the area including affects on community people.

End of the day- everyone picks up a paddle board and explore free time paddling and enjoying the sunset with their new friends. During one camp it was full moon and the campers got to witness sunset and moonrise at the same time. Exquisite moments! As the night fell campfires were ready, bbq dinner followed by smores and stories into the night.

Tobi & Helen Reef *expedition*

Cambebiil at Tobi and Helen Reef was the first camp of the year. Campers were kids from Tobi who reside in Koror and in Tobi. Campers learned of Tobi's limestone forest, common trees, and birds. They also had the opportunity to learn from a local youth the art of "Omelenges," or coconut syrup production. An old tradition that they learned from Indonesian visitors from the olden days. It is also from Indonesia that they acquire seedlings of the midget coconut variety which Palauans call Tahobei and the Tobians call Malayong. Palauans refer to Indonesia as Malayong. The campers got a chance to learn of birds and trees names in their own language in addition to the scientific and general names.

After a day in Tobi, the campers with Ebiil staff and Ngardmau OSCA rangers traveled to Helen Reef where the camp would continue with classes on endangered species, sea turtles, shore birds, sea birds, water lens, coral reef, and the atoll's ecosystem. They would also learn of the threats to the island ecosystem, land use change that contribute to coastal erosion and pollute or reduce the water in their aquifer, snorkel the reef with Ranger Flavin, and monitor nesting green sea turtles. The campers also learned of the disappearing important sea birds such as the Great Frigate and the Booby who no longer reside on the island as a result of deforestation.

In the evening the campers got a chance to monitor nesting green turtles and tag them with the rangers. Such a privileged way of learning.

At the end they would plant 500 trees on the island to help restore the island's forest cover.

Reef Huggers

Jump out of the boat and into the cool ocean- Ebiil Channel! Right away you will be overwhelmed with the vivid colors of corals, fish, giant clams, you name it.

"Whoa!" "This place is soo awesome!" the campers exclaim as they dive into the water. The establishment of these nature parks maintain access for our young children to see some of Palau's most spectacular sightings of massive schools of bump head parrots, wrasse, giant clams so massive they are easily missed for bolder corals, big snappers, sharks, and so much more! These are underwater sightings that if it were not for the preserve, one would need to scuba dive in distant reefs to experience. You can hear the children shouting "sharks, turtles, kemedukl, maml, otkang!" Trying to get the attention of those nearby to share the moment with them.

After the snorkeling of Ebiil Channel the participants travel to other reef areas to plant seedlings of giant clams and sea cucumber, sandfish. The campers planted a total of 182 giant clams and 2500 sandfish (Molech) to help restore the ocean.

Here the participants learn reef ecology and proper use and care of reefs that protects and sustain our reefs and fishery. As they learn in teams they take record of the various types of fish, corals, and invertebrates that they see underwater and together they present their findings back to the larger camp in the evening. Additionally they use art to populate their bare reef interactive wall as they learn more and more.

Drifting across the vast Ebiil reef over the various coral habitat, sand flats, with the reef vivid colors and life beneath our feet. Ahhh, rejuvenating.

Trainer for this class include, Clayton Johanes, Ime Sato, Ann Singeo, and the Park Rangers for Ngarchelong State. Thank you Ngarchelong State-for an awesome classroom!

Cave Explorers!

One of Ebiil favorite- cave exploring! This year campers went exploring the Chelchol er Orrak in Airai and Ilatmilkolk in Ngermid. At Chelchol er Orrak they had the privilege to be guided by Ms. Remurang Rengulbai and her team from Airai State government. Archaeological instructions were given by Meked Besebes the night before with site specific instructions and oral histories given by Airai State government program staff.

Campers explored the caves as burial grounds for the early Palauan settlers, shelters for the Yapese stone money quarry workers and witness some of the unfinished balang, and a small area used for Japanese military defense during World War II.

Students also got a chance to observe caves as part of their cave science class as they learn the types of caves, physical and biological, and explore to identify the caves properties as they learned them. As they explore the depth of the caves they witness gorgeous chandelier lights, dancing as it reflects of the water and bounces on the cave walls- “Looks like disco lights,” kids exclaim with excitement. They rediscover the unfinished balang towering some 10 feet or more, standing like a monolith, tool sherds, and crystal-clear running water beneath the floors of the caves, and so much more! Campers continue to discover bat nesting, birds, and bugs, and all sorts of amazing findings viewed for the first time. The discoveries are endless.

Once lunch is finished the campers move on to Ilatmilkolk cave in Ngermid where they get to snorkel inside a cave and paddle around the coral reefs and amongst rock islands. Here the cave is sunken in the bottom, and one feels as though swimming in a ball with chandeliers (stalactite) above the dome ceiling and stalagmite in the bottom. Using flashlights they discover all sorts of neon-colored corals habituating inside the dept of the cave underwater. It is not easy to get them out of the water and unto the boat, but the camp must return home to Ebiil campus in Ollei, Ngarchelong.

Ngerutechei village remnants and magical stories…

Once we cross the "Did ra Ibai" in village of Ngerutechei we are instantly taken back in time to the mystics of the ancient- a world of gods and humans inter-mingling, of magics and legends. Ngerutechei emerged right after the great flood of Milad and was conquered and obliterated by a warfare orchestrated through the allegiance of Ngeiungel in Ngarchelong, Ngardmau, and Ngiual. All in revenge to save face of Chief Ngirturong, a young brother Ngeiungel Chief called on its allies to wage war on Ngerutechei for their consistent abuse of Ngirturong's wife. Leaving it deserted and hidden in its own mysteries and secrets.

With the permission of Governor Ilolang Remengesau and the generous accompany and teachings of Legislator Mesiual Madlutk the campers uncover the hidden mysteries of Ngerutechei. Witnessing perhaps the largest "btangch" or chief monolithic structure for Uchelrutechei towering over 10 feet above the stone platform of which a chief's body would be laid to rest without burial for its physical ascend into the heavens. He was giant who roamed the village towering over the trees and houses and the villagers would catch a glimpse of his face between the canopy of the gigantic trees above. A few feet from the "iliud," a stone platform assemble for the Chiefs – lays his colossal grave marked with stones ensembled at least 20 feet long. Further along the road we come to the "Iliud ra Ruchel," where the four pillars of Ngeremlengui Chiefs were bestowed by Elid. It is said that the gods would lay down the rainbow to bridge their way onto the land as they go net fishing and return unto the heavens. Remnants of all the clans, a doing or bathing pool, Bai, and "bdelul a chang" or dock, remain throughout the entire area, and domestic plants demonstrating the types of plants depended on by the villagers. At the end of the village towards ocean lies what is said to be the placenta of the deity Milad as she gave birth to Ngaremlengui, Melekeok, Aimeliik, and Oreor. The children learned of the ancient stories between the various trainers, Tuloi Kloulechad and Meked Besebes on the oral history of Milad and the elimination of Ngerutechei, and our site trainer, Legislator M. Madlutk.

Decolonizing Research

These group of young researchers- high school aged, had the opportunity to learn with Ebiil and Stanford University, with Caroline Ferguson, PhD., as their instructor from March – July 2021. Main goal is to teach young Palauans to take interest in indigenous research, to be seekers of Palauan knowledge, to inform of proper research ethics and practices, to develop their own Palauan identity, and to ensure continuity in our Palauan knowledge and practices.

Come with an empty basket

This is a proverb that teaches knowledge seeking at a place of humility and respect, of building trust in relationships, the art of *"melai a tekoi."* The students learned of indigenous research, methodologies, Palauan protocols for borrowing knowledge and where to begin and end, designing research, interviewing, videography, editing, etc. Once they had solid research plans, the journey began and would take them throughout Palau.

Barrowing Knowledge

The students travelled throughout Palau meeting and interviewing elders and knowledge holder of Palau's culture and traditions. The class taught them research skills and knowledge which they used to research certain topic of interest that would take them from Peleliu to Kayangel and Angaur, and throughout Babeldaob. Knowledge holders from Tobi were also interviewed for their fishery and Mesei knowledge and practices. Additionally, the students got their SCUBA certification with a Palauan instructor, Clayton Johanes, a skill that would take them to new environment and personal discoveries of our underwater world. This further solidify the responsibility of gaining knowledge for the purpose of developing conscious interaction with nature and a sense for safeguard.

Intergenerational Knowledge

The young students learned from their elder important lessons on impact of modernization on traditional fishing practices, rules and taboos of fisheries, fishing references for efficiency, cause of community cohesion and conflict, taro cultivation as a women culture and base for our traditional economy, mesei values of respect to mother nature immersed in the practices, personal stories of impact, identity, favorite childhood memories and stories, food systems and sharing, and so much more. A wealth of knowledge that will prepare these young researchers for future endeavors of learning and personal development.

Continuity

Couple junior-high students followed the class for our observation as we develop program and target age groups. All for the purpose of cultivating the next generation of Palauan researchers who would learn from their elder different ways of knowing and doing, reciprocity, food systems and food sharing, community cohesion promoted through, community work in fishery, farming, restoration work- embodied with the Palauan values and principles for peaceful interaction with nature. The class will continue this year, recruiting the next cohort to begin in Spring 2022. The students have been invited to present their studies in the next COP26 in Glasgow and the Ocean Science Conference to be held in Honolulu, HI, where over 3000 scientists around the world gather to present their research.

The one message repeated consistently from the elders to the young researchers was, ***"Don't forget Palau." "Always keep it close to your heart and let it shine through with what you choose to do in life."***

Motivation

Di renguk e ngusek. A Palauan proverb that teaches of personal responsibility of safeguard and decisions for choosing to do what is right- *"our heart guard our actions."*

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