



What to expect on a trip to Big Laurel Learning Center:

Big Laurel is situated in the Appalachian Mountains in Southern West Virginia. Established in 1976 as a school, Big Laurel continues to offer educational programs that strive to build stronger, healthier communities.

Alternative break immersion trips are week-long residential experiences focusing on these three components: **environment**, **community**, and **service**. Each week, participants explore the forested land reserve, learn about environmental preservation, encounter examples of successful community development, and give back to the community through service.

Environment

Our unique location on the ridge of a mountain on a 450-acre forested land reserve presents endless opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, bonfires, and stargazing. Young people immerse themselves in some of the oldest mountains in the world and one of the most biodiverse deciduous forest in the US. Recognizing our impact on the natural world around us, students participate in a zero waste food challenge, learn about and use composting toilets, conserve energy, use harvested rain water for showers and washing, and assist in sustainable practices.

Community

Students witness innovation and connection at work in the various community sites we visit throughout the week. Big Laurel brings participants to visit watershed groups, history museums, agricultural endeavors, after school programs, outreach facilities, small shops and restaurants, and much more. Our Big Laurel participants are offered tours of these facilities. They get to meet staff and volunteers and ask questions. Every evening we have a reflection and students share what they saw and learned, what surprised or challenged them, and what they are looking forward to.

Participants who come willing to listen, learn, try new things, question what they know, and look for deeper meaning and connection will get the most out of this experience. It is our hope that students' eyes may be opened not only to some of the injustices in this world, but also to the ways that communities and individuals are challenging those systems and building on successes.

Service

After enjoying the surrounding nature and getting to know the community, our young people are invited to join us in volunteering and giving back. Whether it's splitting firewood, hauling gravel, turning compost, painting, or gardening, there are always plenty of chores to keep Big Laurel running smoothly.

Overview

Throughout the immersion trips, participants stretch their comfort zones, disconnect from technology, see parallels in the wider world, and strengthen their own self-awareness and connection with nature.

Big Laurel strives to share our understanding of joys and challenges in Mingo County, just a tiny snapshot into one of the 420 counties that comprise the Appalachian Region. It is our hope that students can bring ideas and experiences from Mingo County back to their home communities and inspire action, growth, and change.