

UNBC: Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management Program

by Pat Maher

The University of Northern British Columbia's Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management Program . . . your path to an education, a career and a lifestyle.

The University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) is located in Prince George, British Columbia, at the confluence of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers, and on the doorstep of the Cariboo and Rocky Mountains. Located in the heart of the province, Prince George is an eight-hour drive north from Vancouver, four hours from Jasper, Alberta, eight hours from the Pacific, and 12 hours from the Yukon border. So although UNBC is relatively remote in Prince George, it's the perfect setting for the Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management (ORTM) Program.

UNBC officially opened in 1994, and has already become one of Canada's best small universities (fourth in the Maclean's rankings). It is noted as a research-intensive university with strengths particularly in areas such as Natural Resource and Environmental Studies (NRES). The ORTM Program is part of this area of strength in that it offers two underlying undergraduate degrees: a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Natural Resource Management, with a major in Outdoor Recreation and Conservation, and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Nature-Based Tourism. As well, there is the opportunity for students to pursue graduate studies in ORTM through the integrated NRES program at both the Master (MA, MSc, MNRES) degree and PhD level.

The ORTM Program at UNBC began at the same time as the university, and its first Chair was Alan Ewert (past editor of the *Journal of Experiential Education*, one of the founding editors of the *International Journal of Wilderness* and now professor at Indiana University).

When the program began, there was only a BSc offered; it wasn't until 1997 that the BA materialized after a proposal was accepted by British Columbia's Ministry of Advanced Education. For much of the past 13 years, the ORTM Program was called the Resource Recreation and Tourism (RRT) Program, but this changed in the fall of 2006. Over the past two years, in addition to the name change, the program has been considerably overhauled. With a full complement of four faculty members onsite there has been a complete revision of the curriculum and focus for the program.

The ORTM Program's focus is now squarely on the management of outdoor recreation as it relates to conservation (i.e., in and around parks and protected areas), tourism that is both based in and concerned with the natural/cultural environment rather than business or hospitality, and hands-on integrated learning that gives students real-world experience, and the opportunity to pursue certifications that will supplement their degree and allow them to find meaningful employment in their field/industry.

Present faculty members have strength in areas as diverse as community involvement in tourism, outdoor and experiential education, environmental interpretation, and conservation-based approaches to protected area design, management and monitoring. While it's difficult to highlight only a few key undergraduate courses or projects, here are some recent successes:

- **ORTM 100** — the new first-year capstone course for the program helps students become aware of all the opportunities in the field, involves students in the community for volunteer work, and allows students to meet face-to-face in

their classroom with representatives from agencies such as BC Parks, the Northern BC Tourism Association, the BC Ministry of Tourism Sports and the Arts, and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS).

- **ORTM 301** — the program's third-year environmental interpretation course, which in 2006 involved students working on a local trail project at Driscoll Ridge (100 kilometres east of Prince George). The Interior Cedar/Hemlock ecosystem at Driscoll Ridge is world class, with many old growth trees, and the ORTM 301 class assisted with the design of trail brochures and interpretive signage.
- **ORTM 333** — the capstone field course for the program, which in past years has included visits to Jasper National Park, and Northwest BC (Prince Rupert, the Nass Valley, and so on). In 2007, ORTM 333 is being combined with another ORTM special topic course, and offered as a Field School on the Stikine River for the entire month of August.
- **ORTM 410** — the capstone course in research methods for the program, which offers students an excellent opportunity to work in real-world situations with real agencies that need questions answered or needs assessed. In 2006 this class worked on a project examining the visitor orientation programs at Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site on the Queen Charlotte Islands (Haida Gwaii).

Apart from specific courses, the ORTM program has successfully initiated and maintained partnerships with organizations such as NOLS, Parks Canada, BC Parks, Northern BC Tourism Association, the University of the Arctic, the BC Protected Areas Research Forum, and many more. Graduate studies have been as diverse as studying grizzly bear/visitor interaction in the Khutzeymateen Sanctuary north of Prince Rupert, residents' perceptions of ecosystem management regimes in Mount Robson Provincial Park, and climbers' motivations in Bugaboo Provincial Park.

Across all its degree options the ORTM program strives to capitalize on the unique location of UNBC by discussing relevant outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism within a northern BC, Canadian and international context. The ORTM program offers small class sizes, close contact with faculty, and in our biased opinion, both interesting and challenging courses. From a student's perspective, BSc graduate and MSc candidate Kate Reade says:

The Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management program at UNBC has really strived to keep up with the rapidly evolving field. What I liked best about this program was the small class sizes as we were able to work on real projects and get a taste of what our futures could entail.

Students who might be interested in the ORTM Program likely share the following goals or interests:

- **Respect** for the natural environment
- **Fascination** with outdoor recreation, travel and tourism
- **Passion** for the outdoors and outdoor activities
- **Desire** for flexible employment and career options
- **Curiosity** about how to make a living doing what you love
- **Awareness** of the impacts of outdoor recreation and nature-based tourism, both positive and negative.

For more specific program information, please visit www.unbc.ca/ortm.

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