

Just a Bunch of Rocks
by
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As a teenager, I was exposed to geology on every family vacation. My father, being the geologist that he was, would always make it a point to stop at every geological point of interest on the way to our destination, which of course was either camping or a hotel within miles of a mountain. I was not in any way interested in folds, faults or formations when I was younger. I thought they were “just a bunch of rocks.” When I graduated from high school, my intentions were to follow in my mother’s steps and become a nurse.

In 2013 I enrolled at Stephen F. Austin State University, an independent university consisting of nearly 13,000 undergraduate students located in Nacogdoches, Texas. Like most college students, I was sure I had picked the right major and was ready to start progressing toward my nursing career. I began my education at Stephen F. Austin State University sitting in anatomy and physiology classes uninterested and wondering if this is what I really wanted to focus on for the next four years. To fulfill my Bachelors of Science, I was to take two other sciences, such as physics or geology. Because of my dad’s background, I decided to take a geology class thinking it would be an easy A. However, I was in for something unexpected.

Within three lectures I fell in love with geology. I learned geology was much more than “just a bunch of rocks.” Instead, I found geology to be the study of the earth and its natural processes in their entirety. Throughout the semester my love of geology grew quickly. The classes always ended too soon, and left me wanting to know more. As I drove around my hometown of Nacogdoches, Texas, I began noticing flood plains, gypsum precipitating on Weches Formation outcrops, and became an avid horn coral hunter at my local Lake Nacogdoches. Like the gypsum I had finally come to notice, I saw my desire to know more grow and grow. It was at the end of my second semester I knew I had found my area of study.

Halfway through my fourth geology class I participated in my first college geology field trip. I went back to the place I had gone for so many family vacations, but this time with the mindset of a geologist. As we completed the approximately 17 mile northbound trip on highway 965 from Fredericksburg, Texas, the beauty of Enchanted Rock struck a new chord with me. For the first time I saw Enchanted Rock as the surface expression of a granite batholith uplifted to some 425 above the surrounding terrain and knew what I saw was just the tip of this huge Precambrian granite. The picturesque setting displayed the immense power that the Earth possessed. It was at this time that I discovered geology is not only a science, but an artistic display of the Earth’s history.

Geology is not merely beautiful, it is also a life-applicable science. It affects where we live, how we obtain resources, what we can create, and how we survive. Geology is an interrelational science including disciplines in physics, chemistry, biology, and environmental science with applications extending beyond the obvious to areas of economics, politics, and many other essential parts of modern living. Recognition of these widespread applications helped me realize geology is not just the study of the earth but an exercise in functional knowledge outside of the realm of geology.

An excellent example of this interdisciplinary relationship is environmental geology. Application of geology, chemistry, and biology are essential to reach valid and appropriate decisions for an environmental geologist. Furthermore, the environmental geologist must also apply principals of economics, regulation, and sometimes even politics to effectively negotiate the complexities of what is best for the client and the environment around them. The challenges associated with this complex interaction is why I intend to peruse a career in environmental geology with an emphasis on hydrogeology. Not only will I be using something that I love to help people, but I will also be ensuring that we are responsible for the planet where we live.

Although I am not sure what my future career holds for me, I look forward to expanding my geological knowledge at Stephen F. Austin University and getting the opportunity to productively practice something that I love. If there is one thing I have learned, it's the next time you see "just a bunch of rocks" take another look, what you see may surprise you.