



Parkmont School

Passing Notes

FALL 2023



The world is our classroom. Parkmont students spent ten days hiking, horseback riding, sightseeing, and learning on their trip to Arizona and Utah.

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Staff Summer Adventures

As outdoor adventures are a key component of our program and our students' experience, we'd also like to share our faculty's adventures with you. Practice what you preach! Read on for a few highlights from some of the Parkmont staff's 2023 explorations.

Zulma, Regan, and Matt

Zulma, Regan, and Matt spent eight days in Utila, Honduras to become certified Open Water Scuba Divers! Here's what they told us about their trip.

We found out about Alton's Dive Center on Utila, the smallest of Honduras's Bay Islands, through former Parkmont staff Enti Mooskin. (Shoutout!) Each morning, we completed training dives to learn safety and survival skills under the water. In the afternoons, we went out on the boat to explore the coral reefs in the Caribbean waters around Utila. We all dove down to a maximum of 18 meters (or 60 feet) and are now certified at that depth. We swam alongside sting rays, a hawksbill sea turtle,

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Every morning before diving, our "Middle School Teacher Squad" met up in the morning to eat a typical Honduran breakfast of beans, eggs, and baleadas. With us in the photos are friend and fellow diving student Sabrina and our amazing diving instructor, Lewis.

angelfish, barracuda, and pufferfish! We also completed a night dive and sat on the seafloor in total darkness to view the bioluminescent organisms light up the dark, and even saw an octopus on our return to the surface.

Nijole

Nijole traveled to Mexico City with a friend this past summer. One highlight was visiting two different museums dedicated to Frida Kahlo. They also loved exploring the Xochimilco canals, where they did a food tour of a market and learned about the techniques the Aztecs used to build their farms on the water, including floating barns! A Lucha Libre wrestling match was also a memorable event!



Nijole, at right, with a friend in Mexico City, where they attended a Lucha Libre event and toured two Frida Kahlo museums.



Christy and her son, Si, on top of Saddleback Mountain, the final summit!

Christy

Christy (our returned Director of Institutional Advancement) and her family spend a week in the Adirondacks every summer. For 14 years, some of them have been trying to become 46ers, hikers who have summited the 46 tallest mountains in the Adirondacks (all above 4,000 feet elevation). This summer, a number of her family, including Si, successfully finished! ■

Parkmont School Goes to the Grand Canyon!

By Butheyana Dahmani '24

Day 1

Hooray! We made it to Arizona! We all woke up around 4:00 a.m., got to Parkmont at 5:00 a.m., and left for BWI. Our flight was about six hours, but we all slept through most of it. Our pilot told us before we took off, “We are going to ride this plane like we stole it.” Once we arrived in Arizona, we hopped in our rented van and went to Tacos Huicho... the best tacos we’ve ever eaten. We hiked for about 30 minutes in a beautiful cactus area, took pictures, and went to our Airbnb. The house was extremely beautiful. We were at a loss for words. We checked out the pool and ping pong table. Henok taught all of us how to make samosas, and they were wonderful. We already knew it was going to be the BEST SCHOOL TRIP EVER!

Day 2

We woke up, packed our things, and left the beautiful Airbnb. We had bagels for



breakfast, which were delicious. We drove up to StoneMan Climbing Co., where we climbed up four rock courses, saw some amazing animals, and got to see Butheyana (that’s me!) fall into a cactus. We heard a lot of funny dad jokes. Example: “Are you an ice machine? Because you’re crushin’ it.” It was truly an amazing experience. Once we were finished, we headed to Flagstaff, stopping along the way at a rest stop that had binoculars we could use to see the amazing views. The snowy mountains in Flagstaff were beautiful. Once we

settled in, we went to a restaurant called Timberland’s Tavern, where there were dogs and video games. It was so fun, and the food was amazing. After we finished eating, we headed back to the hotel to pack. So many things were happening, it felt like a never-ending experience.

Day 3

We headed up to the Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument, which was extremely stunning. We visited the

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museum before touring the lava pit, where we learned about the history and got to purchase small souvenirs. We took a small hike along the Lenox Crater Trail where the mountains were volcanoes 50,000 years ago. We went to the Native American craft market, which was stunning, and headed to Sedona. Sedona is such a beautiful town. We wished we'd

had longer there. We got to meet snakes, eat ice cream, and grab a few souvenirs. Then it was time for the Grand Canyon! We checked into the Yavapai hotel and took a quick hike after we settled. The view, the sunset, it was perfect. Then we went back to the hotel, played Uno as a group, and called it a beautiful night at the Grand Canyon!

Day 4

After breakfast in the lodge, we went up to the e-bike rental station to get our bikes. We were all so excited! We saw dozens of elk and mules. We rode the bikes up the Grand Canyon and got lost a couple of times, but we eventually found our way. We stopped at Mohave Point, had a picnic, and enjoyed the view. After we ate, we headed back down and parked our bikes. The Grand Canyon is such an amazing place to be. After a hike, we headed to eat dinner, get packed, and get to sleep. It felt like heaven, and the views were surreal.

Day 5

We woke up at 8:30 a.m. and took a hike on Bright Angel Trail. We hiked two miles down and up. The views were absolutely stunning. Earlier in our trip, Arizona had been a little chilly, but here it was burning hot outside. We all saw amazing features of the Grand Canyon, including arches, steep cliffs, and animals. We also went to a fancy restaurant and tried elk cheese with noodles. After we ate, we drove to the overlook of the Grand Canyon. It was stunning, of course! We went to South Rim to see the Desert View Watchtower

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and got on the road to Page, Arizona. Once we arrived, we settled into the house. The house was so cool and had a pool and ping pong table. We played, ate, and called it a night.

Day 6

We accidentally woke up at 5 a.m., thinking it was 6 a.m.! The time difference stumped us a lot. We got ready to go and traveled to the Antelope Slot Canyon. We went inside the slot canyon. It was so beautiful. After that, we came back to the house and got ready for rafting, but sadly when we got there, they said it was canceled due to high winds. We had a solution: We went bowling! Mekdi won out of all the boys and girls! We came back to the house, chilled a little, and went to see Horseshoe Bend! It was so surreal and beautiful. After viewing and taking pictures, we went home, cooked burgers, and called it a night!

Day 7

We woke up to get ready, had breakfast, and drove to Lake Powell to go powerboating. Sadly, that was also canceled because of winds, but that was OK because we got on the road to Zion National Park in Utah! As soon as we got

to the park, we took a short overlook trail and saw beautiful views and took amazing pictures. Afterwards, we went out to eat, and most of us got big, tasty burgers. It was so good. We also tried raspberry lemonade Sprite. After we ate, we drove for another two hours to our Airbnb, and it was beautiful. There was so much snow, it went over our heads! We made a dinner of spaghetti and meatballs and called it a night until the next day!

Day 8

Today we went horseback riding at Bryce Canyon National Park. It was beautiful and terrifying but really enjoyable. We saw so many cool rock features and formations. After riding, we took a short hike around Bryce Canyon, got souvenirs, and then headed back to the Airbnb. We made homemade pasta, and it was so good. We watched a movie, sat in the hot tub, and chilled.

Day 9

Today we drove six hours from Utah to Arizona. We stopped at Joe's Rock Shop and bought a few rocks and crystals. Ethan and Matt surprised us by stopping at mini-golf! It was a mermaid-castle themed golf course. It was very fun and



enjoyable. We headed to the Airbnb, which was beautiful, and we played pool all night and packed our bags for our last day in Arizona.

Day 10

We got up around 8 a.m. and headed to the airport. The plane ride was smooth until the pilot said there was going to be major turbulence, but we were OK. We landed in D.C., picked up our bags, and headed home. This trip was such a fun experience and honestly changed our lives. We hope to go again! ■



Building Renovation

The communal spaces in our 16th Street building got a major upgrade this summer!

Thanks to generous contributions for our building refurbishment, we got started in June, gutting the central part of the building (the lobby entrance, second-floor landing, second-floor locker area, and basement exit). We repaired woodwork, rebuilt cabinetry, and painted the walls and the trim with bright, new colors. We re-carpeted the spaces and installed new lighting. Our staircase banister

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was repaired and upgraded, and we had new benches and bookshelves built. We installed “forbo” as our new display system, saying goodbye to our old bulletin boards. We even upgraded our photo displays, with new internship photos lining the stairs and a larger-than-life Supergraphic of our 2023 Grand Canyon trip adorning the front hallway. More supergraphics to come soon!

The second-floor landing, before (below) and after (right)



The lobby, before (above) and after (left)



This year, we’re upgrading our front door and security system, and we plan to do an interior upgrade to our classrooms next summer. We haven’t done such a major renovation to the interior since we acquired the building from Somerset School in 1992. We’re all very excited about how our school “home” contributes to our learning and community experience, and we can’t wait to see the classrooms in Phase 2. ■

Parkmont Orientation 2023

The Upper and Middle School orientations were held this year on August 31. New and returning students attended, and we had a wonderful day getting to know each other and familiarizing ourselves with Parkmont and our teachers.

With each division, we started off in the Commons doing introductions. Then we turned to some games! For the high-schoolers, we had a Rock, Paper, Scissors tournament, followed by a giant “Would You Rather” game using two sides of the room. We then challenged kids to get in a line based on their birthdays, last names, and a variety of other categories, without speaking or writing. For the Middle School, we did an Oreo Race, in which you take one of the cookies off the sandwich, stick the cookie with icing on it to your forehead, and race to eat it without using your hands. Ice Breaker Bingo was another game for the younger group. They had loads of fun!

Meanwhile, Mike hung out in the lobby with kids who weren’t feeling as keen about being in the people-filled space with rowdy games. They quietly chatted about new schools, wishes and fears, and worked on fun ways to set goals for the year, fostering an interesting morning where they met peers at their own pace.

Following the group activities, students selected their courses for Session One, and we all ate pizza. It was a great start to the school year, and we’re so excited to have our fabulous new students. ■



Tips for New Students at Parkmont

By Mekdi Gebreslassie '24

We wanted to enlighten new students at Parkmont with a few tips on what to expect, so we asked Mekdi, a senior who will attend Princeton University (congratulations!) next fall, to share her thoughts with them.

Hey everyone, my name is Mekdi, and I am a senior here at Parkmont School. I have been attending Parkmont since the seventh grade, so you could say that I know a little bit about the small yet wonderful things our community has to offer. I remember starting seventh grade being scared, as it was a new school for me, but it was within days of being a part of this community that I knew that I had found the school that fit me best.

For me, calling teachers by their first names was at first strange, but after a while, I realized that I felt closer and more connected to them; they seemed more like friends to me than the scary, authority figures teachers usually are. This close bond that I formed helped me tremendously when I entered high school and



Mekdi Gebreslassie

needed more help with my course load. I especially want to thank Sam and Bridget for always pushing me to try my best but also taking their time outside of class to explain and go over many things with me. The classes I have taken with both teachers were the most challenging but, at the same time, my favorite, as I saw myself get out of my comfort zone and grow as a student.

While we are on the topic of classes, I have to say that having classes with students from different grade levels also made Parkmont special and unique to me, especially since I was able to make friends who were both older and younger than me. This made Parkmont feel more like a big family, something that I was not used to at other schools.

For any new students attending Parkmont, I would advise them to take advantage of the community that Parkmont has to offer. Students are able to talk with teachers on a deeper level and get the help they need before, during, or after school due to the way our schedule is designed. I also advise new students to have fun, make friends, and get out of their comfort zone. This is especially important for high school when deciding what internships to choose. Overall, I want to advise new students to bring their true and most authentic selves, as there will be at least one student who shares the same values and interests. ■

Field Day Scrapbook

Our Fall Field Day was a huge success!
Enjoy seeing our kids in action.



Nijole's Summer/Fall Garden

Nijole made delicious gazpacho and hot sauce this fall using banana peppers fresh from the garden. Here is the Gazpacho recipe.

Garden Gazpacho (adapted from NY Times Cooking)

- ▶ About 2 pounds ripe red tomatoes, cored and roughly cut into chunks
- ▶ 1 Italian frying (cubanelle) pepper or or other long pepper such as Anaheim or banana, cored, seeded and roughly cut into chunks
- ▶ 1 cucumber, about 8 inches long, peeled and roughly cut into chunks
- ▶ 1 small mild onion (white or red), peeled and roughly cut into chunks
- ▶ 1 clove garlic
- ▶ 2 teaspoons sherry vinegar, more to taste
- ▶ Salt
- ▶ ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, more to taste, plus more for drizzling

Step 1

Combine tomatoes, pepper, cucumber, onion and garlic in a blender or, if using a hand blender, in a deep bowl. (If necessary, work in batches.) Blend at high speed until very smooth, at least 2 minutes, pausing occasionally to scrape down the sides with a rubber spatula.

Step 2

With the motor running, add the vinegar and 2 teaspoons salt. Slowly drizzle in the olive oil. The mixture will turn bright orange or dark pink and become smooth and emulsified, like a salad dressing. If it still seems watery, drizzle in more olive oil until texture is creamy.



Step 3

Strain the mixture through a strainer or a food mill, pushing all the liquid through with a spatula or the back of a ladle. Discard the solids. Transfer to a large pitcher (preferably glass) and chill until very cold, at least 6 hours or overnight.

Step 4

Before serving, adjust the seasonings with salt and vinegar. If soup is very thick, stir in a few tablespoons ice water. Serve in glasses, over ice if desired, or in a bowl. A few drops of olive oil on top are a nice touch. ■



Middle School Internships

Internships have always been a fundamental (and fun) part of a Parkmont education. While many schools offer internship programs to high school seniors, every Parkmont student gets to participate in an off-campus internship each year. Even middle schoolers? Yes! In fact, the Parkmont Internship Program, or P.I.P., started back when Parkmont was solely a middle school. Like our travel classes and field trips, P.I.P. invites students to explore the world outside the classroom.

“We feel that this crucial real-world experience helps students not only learn new skills but develop relationships with working adults whose own lives and work experiences provide ideal learning tools for them to begin to design their own futures,” says Nijole Gedutis, Parkmont’s Dean of Students.

For nine weeks each spring, middle-school students spend their Wednesday afternoons working in small groups at sites around the D.M.V. Parkmont interns have spread mulch at the Franciscan Monastery in Brookland, groomed the horses at the Rock Creek

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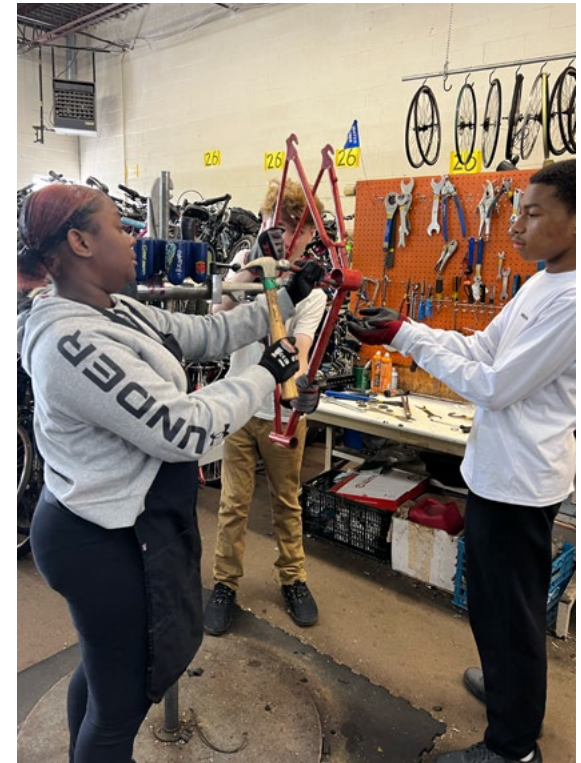
Park Horse Center (always a popular option!), and worked the register at Takoma Bicycles.

In addition to gaining practical, concrete skills they can list on future resumés, students learn to navigate different environments and communicate with new people – including their bosses. “We see supervisors as integral parts of each student’s education,” Nijole says. “As such, we have found that many businesses and organizations throughout the metro area relish the chance to play such an important role in the lives of our students.”

The group format of the middle-school internships encourages students to figure

out how to work effectively in teams and to discern their own emerging leadership skills. The format also prepares them for the more immersive, six-hours-per-week, solo internships that they will participate in throughout their high school careers at Parkmont.

The hardest part for students can be that they’re entering unknown territory. Because Parkmont staff know their students so well, they’re able to coach the students through challenges and hold them in care. Parkmont staff stay on-site with each group to provide support and oversight. They also accompany the middle-school interns to and from their



worksites, with D.C. traffic often supplying extra time for everyone to process the events of the day.

Throughout the nine weeks, students reflect on their experiences and share their acquired wisdom with faculty and peers at school. They emerge more resilient and mature, with the kind of confidence that comes from experience, a deeper understanding of themselves, and a more expansive sense of the possibilities ahead of them in school and beyond. ■

Welcome to Parkmont!

Three new staff members joined Parkmont this January. We're glad they're here!



Kaltra Aliaj will probably be the first person you see when you come to Parkmont. She's our new office administrator and is always happy to answer your questions. Thank you, Kaltra!



Lexis Jordan is our fantastic new art teacher. Her students have been working on the basics of sculpture, using clay, wire, and found objects.



Siobhan Roth has taken on some of Parkmont's communications work and is thrilled to help spread the word about our extraordinary school. ■

Snapshot



Teacher Sam Graul competing at Pickleball at the end of end of a staff-retreat day.



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