

Centennial Middle teacher heads to Arctic for second expedition

By Amy Bounds Camera Staff Writer Boulder Daily Camera
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Centennial Middle School science teacher Bill Schmoker is taking his second research trip to the Arctic this summer as one of 14 educators in the country chosen as Lindblad Expeditions National Geographic Grosvenor Teacher Fellows.

He will spend 12 weeks in the Arctic aboard the Lindblad expedition ship National Geographic Explorer, using the experience to develop lesson plans for his students. The program recognizes teachers who demonstrate excellence in geographic education and provides an opportunity to experience geography through once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

"I was really lucky to be chosen," Schmoker said.

He said teaching about the ocean in landlocked Colorado is a challenge, especially since he learned about oceanography himself mainly through textbooks before he took his first Arctic trip.

"To see how ocean research is done was just incredible," he said. "Oceanography is tricky to teach because you can't just go visit tidepools," he said. "Having the experiences and videos and pictures helps bring it alive."

In the summer of 2010, he was one of 13 teachers from across the country chosen to participate in various polar research expeditions as part of the PolarTREC program funded by the National Science Foundation.

On that trip, he was aboard the 420-foot-long U.S. Coast Guard cutter Healy, which stayed on the open ocean, breaking ice and collecting data to map the geology of the seabed. He and the other teachers were joined on the expedition by scientists.

This summer, he and a teacher from North Dakota will be part of the naturalist crew on a ship that will carry mainly paying passengers looking to explore the Arctic. The ship will leave from Iceland, cross the Denmark Strait through deep ocean water for a day then arrive on the east coast of Greenland, travelling near the shore for the remaining weeks.

The path will follow the "Viking trail," the route taken by the earliest Viking expeditions in the 10th Century, with visits to Viking settlements in southern Greenland. Passengers may also see whales, polar bears and walrus.

"It's more of an eco-tourism based trip," Schmoker said.

The ship will have inflatable motorboats to take passengers to shore for hikes, as well as a remote underwater vehicle that will allow passengers to watch what's happening underwater. Schmoker also plans to take basic measurements of ocean temperatures and salinity.

"One of the big reasons that National Geographic is interested in the Arctic is because it's changing faster than the rest of the world," he said. "Last year was the least Arctic ice ever measured. There's concern not just about the Arctic and the polar bears, but about how that connects to the bigger picture of weather patterns and climate patterns."

To prepare, Schmoker recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate in a pre-voyage workshop with hands-on sessions for learning photography and using Google tools to share his experiences. He also talked with previous fellows.

When he returns, he will develop lesson plans that use what he learned. His plans, along with those of the other teacher fellows, will be shared by National Geographic as a teacher resource.

"It's really great that they've committed to bringing teachers out in the field," Schmoker said. "It's incredible to send

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teachers to places they're teaching about, but would never get to experience."

For more information, go to natgeoed.org/gtf.

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