

## Visiting High School Students 'Amazed' on Field Trip to Ackerman Mine and Power Plant

Contributed by Edwin Smith  
06/12/2008

Intro to Engineering students begin a tour of the North American Coal Corp.'s Red Hills Coal Mine and Power Plant. Listening to a supervisor (third from left) are Braden McCauley of Farmington, N.M.; Bryan Hostettler of Rome, Ga.; Arin Jones of Columbus; Jonathan Lalo of Brandon and Melanie Graupner of Oxford. Photo courtesy of Maxine Woolsey.

OXFORD, Miss. - Fictional archaeologist Indiana Jones is unearthing some magnificent discoveries on the silver screen this summer, but some high school students visiting the University of Mississippi recently found a similar real-life treasure trove just hours from campus.

The seven visiting students - enrolled in Engineering 100 as part the Summer College for High School Students program - along with three Ole Miss engineering students and three staff members, made their discovery on a field trip to the Red Hills Mine and Power Plant, an affiliate of North American Coal Corp. located near Ackerman.

Members of the group expressed amazement at seeing the coal refinery process, which supplies electricity to the Tennessee Valley Authority.

"This was a fantastic experience," said Maxine Woolsey, educational outreach specialist in the School of Engineering and coordinator of Engineering 100. "The students were allowed to see how all disciplines of engineering operate together to provide electrical power to thousands of north Mississippi households on a daily basis."

During the outing, the students learned about the history of the 10-year-old mine. They also witnessed how the lignite is uncovered, shoveled into dump trucks, then deposited into areas where it is crushed and transported to the power plant to be transformed into electricity.

"Watching the whole mining process from beginning to end was very interesting," said Michael Huber, a student from Blackmon High School in Murfreesboro, Tenn. "The power plant has many floors, boilers, turbines and other heavy equipment. It was fun to watch."

"It was truly amazing to see how all that coal goes into a relatively small machine that transfers so much energy," added Nathan Flippo of Shoals Christian School in Florence, Ala.

Others were impressed with the environmental restoration aspects of the mine.

"Having seen the worst of strip mining in the '60s, I think the Red Hill is an amazing facility," said Cathy Grace, staff geologist and coordinator of academic and administrative affairs. "I was glad the students were able to see a mining operation done beautifully from an environmental standpoint."

Zack Parchman, a junior civil engineering student from Amory, was also impressed with the environmental aspect of the project.

"I was amazed at how they transformed land depleted by the mining process into wooded forests and lakes," Parchman said. "Also, the fact that the processing plant where the coal is burned produces extremely low emissions is really cool."

Arin Jones of Columbus, a student at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, said, "I found the way they use ash to build streets that are as strong as those made with concrete very interesting."

Taylor Langford, an Ole Miss engineering alumnus who teaches chemistry and physics at Lafayette County High School, said the trip was an excellent reinforcement of the subject matter he has been covering as an Engineering 100 instructor.

"As a teacher, I believe it's good to be able to expose students to the practical applications of whatever it is we're talking about," Taylor said. "Having the students see all the different types of engineering being used in this operation was a rare and great opportunity for everyone."

The trip would not have been possible without the transportation provided by UM's Office of Community Outreach and Summer School, Woolsey said.

"The students belong to the Summer College for High School Students program," said Jason Wilkins, outreach project coordinator. "This was a wonderful class, which really does really neat things. With the computer science course they're taking, it's like experiencing a full semester in college, only in a monitored environment."

In addition to Flippo, Huber and Jones, the other visiting high school students enrolled in Engineering 101 are Bryan Hostetler of Rome, Ga., Chris Huber of Murfreesboro, Tenn., Jon Lalo of Brandon and Taylor Yates of Ridgeland.

For more information about the School of Engineering, visit <http://www.olemiss.edu/engineering>

or call 662 915 7407. For more information about the Summer College for High School Students, call Wilkins at 662 915 6614.