
Bug Bites: College Admission Essay Sample

My legs are dotted with faded scars left behind by mosquito bites.

Sitting in a stuffy classroom in early September, I look down at them nostalgically. In June, my feelings towards mosquito bites were less cordial. I had just begun a 45-day backpacking trip in the Brooks Mountain Range of Alaska, a place whose website dons a whole page simply on avoiding the pesky insects. During the first weeks spent in the mountains, my skin crawled with bugs. The bites emphasized the aching in my legs left by long days of hiking over the unstable ground. They spread across my hips and shoulders alongside bruises from my 70-pound backpack. The itch kept me up at night, tossing and turning in a claustrophobic tent.

When the physical challenge threatened to overwhelm me, I asked myself why I decided to give up a typical teenaged summer for a trip to the Alaskan wilderness. The answer was easy to find. I wanted an experience that would push me as far from my comfort zone as possible for the sake of personal growth. Spending my time doing seemingly meaningless things had grown exhausting. While backpacking, each step is aimed towards a point on the map. Items are only carried if their purpose justifies their weight. Every action is deliberate, authentic, and meaningful. I wanted to fill myself with the same sense of purpose. These goals, along with 100% deterrent bug spray, transformed every discomfort into an opportunity for growth.

By July, my hands no longer wandered down my legs to scratch the lingering red bumps. Mosquitos filled the air around my face, rested on my lips, and crawled across my forehead without me noticing. Coils of firm muscle developed under the skin of my thighs, allowing me to traverse steep, rocky terrain without losing my breath. I learned to walk with my pack balanced on my hips, no longer wincing from the tender bruises on my shoulders. I began acknowledging the small discomforts of everyday life without dwelling on them.

By August, the bites I had rubbed raw in June scarred over, becoming a permanent part of me. The Brooks Range became part of me too. I felt at home in the rugged landscape of the arctic tundra, a place that at first seemed too vast and grandiose to become familiar with. I was no longer startled at the caribou who peered curiously at my group. I could finally fall asleep with the sun shining throughout the night. Intention became instinctual. I recognized the purpose of each action before carrying it out.

Now, the scars remain but the itch does not. There are parts of me left behind in Alaska. Doubt. Self-consciousness. I'm still discovering new things I carried home with me. It can be easy to look at experiences and see them as finished. Alaska helped me view them differently. The

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physical experience I had in the Brooks Range remains there, but the person I became does not. That person is still evolving. I went to Alaska in search of an authentic experience and came home a more authentic person. This new version of myself allows me to live each day of my life with purpose. I won't let small obstacles prevent me from doing what I know I must do. I won't let the mosquitos keep me from the mountains.

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