As a SURE/SCEC intern this summer, I was given the opportunity to jump right into the heart of southern California geology. As a newer comer to the West Coast, this not only allowed me to explore parts of California, but also presented me with firsthand experience in geodetic surveying that only California could provide. The purpose of my project was to gather GPS data in areas surrounding Riverside County in order to determine slip rates of the San Jacinto fault line, southern California’s second most dangerous fault.

My mentors taught me everything I needed to know from setting up GPS devices to processing the data. Through their guidance, I was able to gain enough experience to go into the field myself and do my own surveys. My field days involved early morning drives to various benchmarks and setting up the GPS in minimal time to allow for the receivers to record as much data as possible. Then I would return to each benchmark in the evening, bring the equipment back so I could upload the data, and get ready for the next field day. Although the days were long, it was a great chance to be outside and gain a better understanding of the landscape.

The processing portion of my project was the most intense. I had taken one class prior in programming, but after this summer, I’ve become more comfortable with it. I now know how much programming plays a role in geophysical research, giving me something I can work towards becoming more experienced with in my last year of university. I definitely struggled with it, but my mentor was able to help me every step of the way.

My internship opened my eyes beyond what my professors have explained in lecture. As much as one may have a firm grasp on the concepts and methods involved in this field, being able to apply them to your work is the real test. This summer was just the beginning. At times, I was entirely frustrated with my work and others I wanted to keep going forever. I distinctly remember my mentor saying, “This is what GPS is really like, now you know what I go through all the time.” The main point is that you just have to keep going no matter what.

Through it all, my field notebook became my best companion. I was told keeping a field notebook was similar to keeping a journal, and will become a valuable tool when someone else or yourself wants to revisit your research. Needless to say, mine was always in my back pocket.

In the end, this summer definitely did not turn out how I thought it would at all, but that’s what makes it an experience, right? A summer I’ll never forget.