Wilderness School

Enabling Adventurous Learning Through A Cellular-Powered Remote Network

880
students
enrolled annually

#1
girls school in
South Australia

Top 10
highest achieving
schools in Australia

Industry

🖼 Primary Education

Location

🌐 Medindie, South Australia

Products

📶 MG

📶 MR

❄ MX

Highlights

- MG provided reliable coverage via wireless for a remote campsite 200km away from the main campus

- Installation of MG took no more than 25 minutes and outperformed previously installed satellite

Introduction

By leveraging the Cisco Meraki Wireless Gateway (MG), the team at Wilderness School were able to ensure reliable internet coverage at a remote campsite so that students and staff received the same "adventurous learning" experience they had come to expect on campus.

The challenge

The Medindie neighborhood of Adelaide, South Australia, is a suburban community known for its beautiful historic mansions and easy drive to the city center. Also at the heart of Medindie's history is a school, opened by a local family in 1884 at their home, to provide education to the local community. Today, Wilderness School, as it's now called, enrolls up to 880 students annually and is the top-rated girls school in South Australia. It has also been recognized as one of the top-ten highest achieving schools in Australia.

Of course, none of these achievements are by accident, as it's the staff and students' commitment to the school's core values that ensures top marks year after year. One of those values, "adventurous learning," is typified by the school's mix of classroom, outdoor, and off-campus learning. Adventurous learning also means that students are empowered to be deeply curious and are enabled to find answers—and that requires a dependable network infrastructure.

This was the core challenge taken up by Micheal Bowden when he joined Wilderness School as Director of Information Technology in 2015. One of the main problems he addressed was how to make sure students had reliable internet access at the school's remote campsite, located just over 200 km away at Salt Creek, along South Australia's picturesque Coorong National Park. Micheal wanted to make sure that students had a seamless internet experience between the main campus and the campsite. Students would spend three weeks at the location learning life skills, studying the natural environment, and engaging in their usual studies. The activity was called 'Realize,' and was the highlight of many students' experiences at Wilderness School, so solid internet access was a must.

The solution

Micheal tried a few different solutions to provide dependable internet access at the Salt Creek campsite. He tested out a few 4G dongles provided by mobile phone companies and found that they didn't provide reliable speed and often dropped connection. He then turned to satellite internet, but found that it provided only variable coverage when the weather was bad, and wasn't very cost effective even when the weather was good.

Micheal was already familiar with Cisco products because the main campus was fully outfitted with Cisco network hardware. Additionally, they used Cisco WebEx exclusively for virtual learning. So when Micheal saw that Meraki was launching the Cisco Meraki Cellular Gateway (MG) in Australia, he didn't hesitate to buy one immediately. He had confidence that Meraki, as part of Cisco, would deliver the same quality right out of the box that he was used to.

Installation of the MG could not have been easier. Micheal and his team bolted the device to a pole and then connected it to the rest of their Meraki setup at the campsite, including a Meraki MR access point and MX security gateway. The whole process took no more than 25 minutes.

The team then leveraged the Meraki dashboard to further optimize their network at the campsite. They used the signal strength feature to position the MG for the most optimal cellular reception, then kept a close eye on the cellular network performance insights available through the Meraki dashboard. After three months of gathering data, they found that the MG provided consistent reliability and speeds of up to 300 mbps, vastly outperforming the satellite. Based on that, they decided to make the MG their primary connection for all priority applications and then routed all nonessential apps, such as Netflix, to the satellite connection. Furthermore, the Meraki dashboard enabled Micheal's team to manage the campsite network from their main campus, even with no IT staff at the remote site.

The results

With the help of the Meraki MG, Micheal was able to provide students and staff with the same reliable network at the Salt Creek campsite that they were used to at the main campus. The result is an education ecosystem that lives up to the Wilderness School value of adventurous learning. Students and staff at the campsite were able to draw knowledge from the natural environment while still having access to the depth of learning that can take place online, even from a remote location. And because the entire network at the remote site was managed from campus, the experience was unified and seamless for Micheal's IT team as well. Two networks effectively became one.

> "
> I love Meraki products because they just work. I don't have to do a lot of testing. That's why I bought the MG right when it became available in Australia—and I wasn't disappointed. The Meraki MG works. The competition didn't. It's that simple."
>
> ───────────
>
> **MICHEAL BOWDEN**
> *Director of IT*

It's not the end for Micheal's team either. They continue to push the boundaries of what "adventurous learning" means with plans to start using virtual reality (VR) devices for lessons in the near future. Through Meraki, Wilderness School has been able to deliver on their values—providing students with an unparalleled education experience supported by advanced, simple, technology that "just works."

Contact us at sales@meraki.com for more details.