

Ranch Trek '07, June 8-9
Annual gathering of Prairie Plains members and friends at the Sioux County Ranch (Guadalupe Memorial Prairie)

Breathtaking scenery, wonderful food, fellowship with old friends and new, cowboy poetry and even shopping Harrison characterized the 2007 Ranch Trek. Twenty-some members traveled to the highest point in the state for the event, and were joined by many others from the area for the Saturday night prime rib feed at the ranch.



Also enjoying the hike in the hills were our five teen ranch trekkies from Aurora - Alison Mitchell, Marcy Jacobsen, Jeanette George, Laura Whitney and Anna Cepek.



Left top - There was a record turnout for the Saturday night barbeque with prime rib served up by Charlie Skavdahl.



Left - A good time was had by all young'uns!



A favorite tradition is the early evening hikes up the hills just west of ranch headquarters. Here Jeanne Dill takes in the view of the headwaters of the Niobrara, the cottonwood grove with heron rookery, and seemingly endless grass-covered hills into the sunset.



Cameron Jones enjoyed his stay at the newly opened Harrison House Hotel, and is proud of his new cowboy hat & boots from Whiteaker's in downtown Harrison.



Cowboy poetry written and recited by neighbor rancher Joe Nunn was the perfect touch to the Saturday's gathering.



Outdoor Ed at ONP

The annual seventh grade Summer Enrichment program, sponsored by the Albion

Education Foundation and Boone Central Schools, was once again organized and taught by Mike and Cheri Blocher and Mitch Osborn from Boone Central Schools, and Mark Seier from Newman Grove Public Schools.



Summer Enrichment students: In front - Drew Wirges, Chandra Griesman, Gina Nelson; middle row - Brett Temme, Scott Boettcher, Britany Seda & Breann Thorberg; in back - Trevor Koetter, Erin Grundmayer & Emily Bowman.

Enrichment participants took part in a wide variety of activities including photography, turtle tracking, a scavenger hunt using GPS, a study of snakes, poetry writing, and water chemistry. Campers also got a taste of pioneer life, assisting with a Dutch oven prepared stew and cobblers under the direction of Lonnie Zrust. Along the same pioneer theme, they used antique mahinery to shell and grind corn, and also visited the nearby historic Orford Cemetery.

The class ended with swimming and tubing in the Beaver followed by homemade ice cream.



Summer research student Hilary Wolf working on the willow planting project.

Mitch Osborn and Mark Seier also continued their high school research program at ONP this summer. Students have been conducting research on oak trees and on ornate box turtles for several years. This summer they also took on a Beaver Creek bank stabilization project involving planting willows just north of the bridge.



It was "smooth sailing all the way" for the fully loaded 11th flight of the Big Bend SOAR Program, according to coordinator Jenny Hultquist. The camp, held June 18-21 and June 25-28, really enjoyed having a flowing river again!



Having water in the river makes for a much more interesting "Wet & Wild," on the Platte at Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary.

A special treat this summer was the first "Ag Day" for Big Bend. It was held at the Hultquist Farm, and included studies of farm crops and equipment and interaction with chickens, goats, sheep, and even a Belgian draft horse courtesy Kevin Christensen.

Big Bend SOAR is co-sponsored by Rowe Sanctuary; details about this summer's camp will appear in a separate publication obtainable from Jenny (402-756-0677).



"Stories" was the theme for SOAR Flight 16, dedicated in memory of Duane Hutchinson, who delighted SOAR campers and many others with his gift of storytelling through the years. 122 campers and 24 peer leaders participated in the camps, held July 9-13 and July 16-20.

The best story this summer was that we had a real, watered, flowing Platte River! What a difference a river makes for Summer Orientation About Rivers!

We also enjoyed exploring a new field site northwest of Palmer belonging to the Reeves Family. This extensive rolling acreage is a pre-Pawnee archeology site and includes Rock Creek and a prairie dog town. It also offered the most memorable bus ride ever, both for campers and drivers!



These happy faces reveal how we all felt about the fully flowing Platte for Monday's river explorations bordering Griffith Prairie and River Day at Bader Park.



Mark Brogie, SOAR bird man (and science teacher at Creighton Community Schools) netted both new species and a record number of species. Shown here is a Great Crested Flycatcher. Read more in the August *Link*.



SOAR alumnus Jordan Jensen dazzled SOAR campers with his model airplane flyover at Griffith Prairie. The plane had a tiny camera and transmitter on board so we could watch an eagle's view of the river and prairie on a TV below! More on Jordan in the next *Link*.



Here, snakey snakey... new presenter David Nieves, professional herpetologist, demonstrates the proper way to catch the reptile. SOAR gave David a 5-star rating: to learn more about him and his fascinating books, check out reptilesupclose.com. And to get a look at the giant surprise he unveiled for the Thursday night's family program, go to prairieplains.org (SOAR Scrapbook).

Approaching Events

Local Restoration Site Tour
Thursday, Aug. 23
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Please call Prairie Plains for details
402-694-5535



September 9
9:00 a.m.
FamFest hike at Griffith Prairie followed by brunch
famfestaurora.org

THANK YOU

- to all SOAR supporters and presenters (detailed acknowledgments to appear in the next *Link*)
- to Lynda Ochsner and Judy Bovill for assistance with the May *Link* mailing;
- to Ernie & Lynda Ochsner and Tony Curtis for cleanup work at the original Sands Barn site;
- to Joe Ford, Jim Barr, Karl and Kathy Melson and Gerry Steinauer for assisting with the completion of the fence at Griffith's; and
- Special thanks to the many people who have sent their condolences and contributions in memory of Charles.

MORE ON SOAR
in the next *Link*
and at
prairieplains.org

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newsletter of



June-July, 2007

A Time for Every Purpose

A time of joy and a time of sorrow describes the summer of 2007 for Prairie Plains. The level of activity and accomplishment over the past two months, including well-attended and successful SOAR and other outdoor education programs, were joyful experiences.

Now it is a time of mourning. Father, friend, board member and legal counsel for Prairie Plains since 1980, Charles Whitney will be fondly remembered and greatly missed.

Charles L. Whitney, Jr.
October 1, 1918 - July 26, 2007



A joyful moment shared by father and son: the ground-breaking ceremony for the Prairie Plains Education Center, September 29, 2006.

A Tribute to my Father by Bill Whitney

Thirty years ago this summer my Dad entered Aurora's Memorial Hospital to continue convalescing from a serious autoimmune muscle disease that nearly cost him his life during a nearly seven-month stay at the University Med Center in Omaha. That same summer Jan and I moved from Lincoln back to Aurora and were fixing up Grandma's house to live in, at least temporarily until opportunities came up elsewhere. We had no major job prospects but figured we could get by for a while. In the fall Dad finally went home from the hospital. Unfortunately he missed his 1977 Canada fishing trip, but he made 20 more trips with his gang of fishing buddies after that. He went back to work and strived resolutely to remain active, and especially to stay out of hospitals. He was still going to the office until three weeks before his death and avoided the hospital until July 9th.

Jan and I liked living in Aurora and wanted to stay. What we could not begin to know or appreciate then was not only the time we would have with Dad, but also the level of involvement we would share. Kids often do not appreciate or understand what their parents do for a living, or think about the source of the economic privileges they benefit from. I was no different. My interests, though shaped by both parents in many ways, were strongly influenced by many hours spent in the outdoors with Dad. They were not in law and business. I also bucked conservative parental advice, which could and often did go against my more selfish inclinations. Yet, when the idea of creating a nonprofit organization surfaced in late 1979 I needed a lawyer and I knew a trusted one. Dad incorporated Prairie Plains in 1980. He wondered what in the world I was doing, and how that could help me make a living, but he still did me that favor. He also doled out much good advice such as: Write a good set of purposes for the articles of Incorporation. Develop your activities and business practices with close attention to those avowed purposes. Be practical.

In order to learn and apply new information he studied up on the legal and tax issues of nonprofit organizations, specifically land trusts. This prepared him to complete eight Prairie Plains land transactions, which he did as a service with no charge. Because of his general country lawyer knowledge he crafted many successful land gifts, land purchases and a number of leases. A few involved more complicated estate planning procedures and all involved his fundamental understanding of the Prairie Plains mission. For many years he came into the office first thing every morning to find out what was going on in the Institute and offer his help and advice (always preceded by, "Are the girls [grandaughters] doing ok?")

In all this and more, including many road trips across the state, and many stories, Dad and I had a working relationship that was very important to us both. For this I am thankful beyond words because it is a rare gift to have that opportunity. He shaped in a large way how I thought about and acted upon building and nurturing an organization. Prairie Plains Resource Institute – if it would have existed at all - would be much different had he not pulled through back in 1977. Our work association, though not his only work at the end of his 61-year career (he finally had to leave some work at the office undone), helped keep him more active as he geared down later in life. I gradually gained greater respect and feeling for his life of service – not only to Prairie Plains, but to his country, town, the people he did business for, and his family. It is important for Prairie Plains to honor this legacy in its work.

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