



SOARing through Summer

Outdoor Education Supplement to *Prairie Plains Link* Summer, 2011

This traditional River Day closing ceremony also concluded the 20th flight for SOAR's pilot program. Look inside for the rest of the story!

SOAR 2011 Big Bend Camp Flight 15

June 20-23 & June 27-30

Serving the Buffalo and Kearney County area and sponsored locally by Rowe Sanctuary
rowesanctuary.org

This Big Bend SOAR report comes from Coordinator Jenny Hultquist:

This year we celebrated our 15th summer of helping kids explore and discover nature along the Platte River. We served a total of 150 campers, setting a new record!

We thought we had seen the most water ever in the river in 2010, but 2011 brought even more! Our "winging" skills were put to the test as we had to adjust sites and schedules and deal with the van and buses getting stuck. Of special concern was a safe and suitable site for River Day. All worked out well, though, and the restored wetland by Jamalee Blind served as our River Day site. The campers seined up lots of cool river life there, including an orange-spotted sunfish (a first for us)!

We had some great speakers this year: Kip Petersen shared his nature photography with us; Jeni Homan taught students how to draw and paint birds; Lindsay Vivian demonstrated how to pin insects for collections; Bill and Jan Whitney and Sarah Bailey from the Prairie Plains Resource Institute led a plant session; Chad Johnson and Diana Luscher from NPPD held an interactive session in the water demonstrating water turbines, Jeanine Lackey showed campers how to look for signs of mammals along the river, Betsy Finch and staff from Raptor Recovery Nebraska showed several of their birds, and Brad Eifert helped us seine and identify fish.

Special recognitions were in order this summer as Judy Niemack served her 15th and final year at SOAR. She and Lisa Clapper were the only two remaining original staff members, and both were recognized for their outstanding service and commitment during our family night program. Also noteworthy regarding staff: We added Gavin Blum (former peer leader), and also greatly appreciated help from Matt Jones, Rowe Sanctuary's AmeriCorps volunteer. Both are great with the campers and lots of fun!

2011 Big Bend SOAR Planning & Teaching Staff: Jenny Hultquist, Coordinator; Lisa Clapper, teacher (Minden); Judy Niemack, retired teacher (Lincoln); Wendy Deyo, teacher (Kearney); Stephanie Cutler, teacher (Omaha); Mason Bushnell, UNO student; Gavin Blum, Midland University student; Nicole Salisbury, Tri-Basin NRD; Keanna Leonard, Education Director, Rowe Sanctuary; Matt Jones, Naturalist Educator, Rowe Sanctuary.

Thanks to Jenny for this report and the photos. For complete coverage of Big Bend SOAR, including list of sponsors and other credits, request a *Big Bend SOAR Journal* from Jenny at rjhultquist@gtmc.net.

From left: Campers collect fish from the seine on River Day; Chad Johnson from NPPD demonstrates how a water turbine works; Collin Niemack uses a Magiscope to view aquatic life that he caught in a freshwater slough.





Thursdays at Griffith Prairie & the Platte: River exploration, insect & spider netting, the “herp show” and plains games kept us busy Thursday mornings. Week 2 had a bonus session on meteorology, featuring a live 30-minute thunderstorm. **Photos from left, then clockwise:** Knocking the skull off the post is the object of this game of the plains; River Walk; Week 2 groups having a prairie walk instead (due to the elements); UNL Extension Educator & herpetologist Dennis Ferraro shows a milk snake (a Griffith Prairie native); spider expert Deb Hauswald checking out campers’ arachnid catches; careful “bug jar” observation.



Fridays (River Day!) on the Platte: Bush Island landowners saved the day for us, since our usual river sites were not an option due to high water. The Platte channel through Bush Island was perfect for our needs. **Photos from tadpole, then clockwise:** Fish are not the only critters scooped up in the Fish Find; other Fish Find catches, including a longnose gar; the “observe and release” (from Fish Find) lineup; ornithologist Gary Lingle shows one of several bird species caught in his mist net - a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak; the challenging hula hoop station of the obstacle course; relaying the raindrop in Raindrop Relay; and some serious tube racing.

SOAR Afternoons: Although our emphasis is definitely on outdoor learning, when midday heat is bearing down we return to the Aurora Middle School for lab, artwork, writing and games relevant to SOAR subjects.

Photos from left: leaf & flower pounding resulted in some beautiful designs on cloth; the Microbe Show was a hit on Monday afternoon as well as on Family Night; Trevor Sullivan, speaking for all of the Week 1 peer leaders, being put to the test in “Are You Smarter than a SOAR Camper?” and one example of our campers’ amazing papier-mâché masks.



SOAR 2011
Aurora Camp
Flight 20

July 11-15 & July 18-22

Serving Hamilton County
 & surrounding area

Enjoy more scenes from SOAR at
prairieplains.org

Flight Twenty! For those of us who've been on board for all 20 years (which includes all but one of the original founders) this was certainly a milestone to celebrate. It was fun to recall some of the years' highlights, a few best left out of print . . .but the most fun was still just *doing* SOAR! We are grateful to be in a place and situation that allows us to bring kids out to prairies and rivers to explore and learn and enjoy. These pages offer just a tiny sampling of the camp; please go to our website for more:

www.prairieplains.org

Mondays at Bush Island:

We had two great opening days at this brand new SOAR site, thanks to the generosity of Bush Island land-owners. There was lots of water to sample for critters in Wet & Wild; live mammal traps were set, plants were studied and collected and native wetland plant seedlings were transplanted.

Photos from top:
 Mike Stewart assists with aquatic life identification in Wet & Wild; Sarah Bailey directing the session where campers transplanted native wetland plants she grew in the Prairie Plains greenhouse.



Tuesdays - SOARing into the night at Bader Park:

The first week's night session was downright chilly - quite out of line with the rest of SOAR! Unfortunately, it was also overcast, so we missed out on the Sky Watch that night. However, Week 2 campers had the best star show ever! Other activities include those pictured above. **Photos from top left, then clockwise:** New SOAR presenter Dr. Heather York from Doane College taught us lots about bats, but the mist nets only caught birds!; a beautiful setting for watercolor painting; Amy Wilson (Book Woman) with the evening's campfire story; S'mores!

**Wednesdays (Heritage Day)
 at Farmers Valley Cemetery:**

Farmers Valley is a favorite site for Heritage Day, where we learn a few things about local history. This year Suzanne Ratzlaff shared some history of the cemetery, Skip Meyer interpreted many of the symbols on the gravestones and also showed the campers how to dowse for unmarked graves, and we had loads of fun with two Bruce Ramsour original activities. **Photos from left:** Skip Meyer's session; Mormon cart races (a Bruce Ramsour production); two very enthusiastic campers playing "Pa" and the villain, "Bad Bart" in the Ramsour original Nebraska history melodrama.





Annual Summer Enrichment Camps at ONP

Thirty-seven 6th- & 7th-graders from Boone Central Middle School, Albion St. Michael's School and Spalding Academy took part in a summer enrichment program taught by

local educators at Olson Nature Preserve May 31st-June 2nd.

ONP campers enjoyed a fun variety of activities including building, decorating and flying kites; a lesson on snakes taught by Mark Seier - including the opportunity to handle a fox snake and bull snake; nature photography by Mike Blocher; insect trapping and a GPS scavenger hunt directed by Mitch Osborn, a theater workshop and creative writing taught by Cheri Blocher; and history lessons presented by Lonnie Zrust that included a study of gravestones in the Orsord Pioneer Cemetery.

The third and final camp day featured a pioneer meal, with students preparing vegetables for the Dutch oven-cooked stew. They also shelled and ground corn as the pioneers did, using antique tools supplied by Lonnie Zrust. Kate and Mike Connelly showed tools and weapons used on the Oregon Trail, expanding the lessons on pioneer life.

Following tradition, the camp ended with swimming in the Beaver River and enjoying homemade ice cream.

The 2011 7th- & 8th-grade ONP enrichment program was made possible by area teachers/planners Cheri & Mike Blocher, Mitch Osborn, Mark Seier and Lonnie Zrust - and by funding from Boone Central Schools and the Albion Education Foundation.



Above, 7th- & 8th-grade campers preparing vegetables for the Dutch oven-cooked meal on Pioneer Day; below, flying the kites they built and decorated during the camp.



Twenty-three 5th graders from Boone Central and St. Michaels' Schools enjoyed their two-day camp at ONP on August 9th-10th. Activities included working with GPS instruments; making sand art stones; sharpening observations skills on an "unnatural trail" and spotting "camouflage insects" (created and hidden earlier); setting pitfall insect traps; and writing poems

inspired by the plants and wildlife observed in the various ecosystems of the preserve.

The fifth graders also have a traditional closure for their camp - cooling off in the Beaver River, seining for aquatic life, running races ("testing the current") - and just having fun in the water.

The 2011 5th-grade workshop was made possible by teachers Mitch Osborn, Tom Dickey and Cheryl Sherburne, with funding from the Albion Education Foundation.

Thanks to Mitch Osborn and Cheryl Sherburne for reporting on these programs and providing the photos!

A favorite activity - seining in the Beaver River, anticipating what interesting aquatic creatures will be discovered.

