



WEDNESDAYS:
En route to Farmers' Valley Cemetery, we stopped to visit the Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve. Shown here are peer leader Joel Ratzlaff and his "Red Shiners."



Later, we learned some history about Farmers' Valley Cemetery from Henderson teacher Suzanne Ratzlaff.



Skip Meyer taught us the meaning of symbols on the cemetery stones, and also showed us how to dowse for unmarked graves.



We made rubbings from some of the stones; later in the afternoon we did some writing to go with the rubbings.



Yes, we love the trees...but these campers were also measuring the circumference of the trunk.



Bruce Ramsour's "Mormon Cart Races" include a history lesson and a whole lot of fun!



THURSDAYS were spent at Griffith Prairie and the Platte. "Prairie Pie" was a history and ecology lesson that ended with a wild flop-flingin' contest.

UNL Extension herpetologist Dennis Ferraro was a big hit with his snakes. The "Milk Snake" group was especially excited to see a live representation of their mascot (above). At right, the Rat Snake is shown.



UNL entomology graduate student and bee researcher Dori Porter presented a session on bees. Assisting her was UNL student and fellow bee enthusiast Alex Heiden (SOAR peer leader 2007-08.) Alex is showing campers the kind of bee trap they use in their field research.



This red hat group is attempting to sculpt out Nebraska and her rivers.

SOAR continued on insert page.

SOARING through Summer Prairie Plains Link Supplement, June-July, 2009:



The SOAR (Aurora Camp) green hat group herding fish on River Day, July 10.





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Photos courtesy Jenny Hultquist

Big Bend SOAR Coordinator Jenny Hultquist reports that both weeks of camp (June 15-18 and June 22-25) were fully loaded - for a total of 136 enthusiastic campers! The Platte was high due to the rainy spring, and unfortunately the River Days could not be held in the river channel. The resourceful planning staff had things well under control, though, with Plan B activities that still got the campers wet, including a presentation by Brad Eifert, Fisheries Biologist with the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission.

Both camp-in nights (Wednesdays) included unplanned and exciting live meteorology shows that thankfully passed by with no harm done. The Week 2 re-run even included a double rainbow encore! And in both weeks the highly anticipated "Amazing Race" took place after the storms. Amy Wilson and Jan Whitney from SOAR's Aurora camp attended the second week, enjoying the sky show and witnessing the wild & crazy scavenger/race so enjoyed by Big Bend campers.

New presenters this summer included Six Guns for Hire, a western acting group from Shelton; Chris Rundstrom, a Land Steward for The Nature Conservancy; and Dennis Clapper, a fishing enthusiast who did a whole group presentation and a cane pole fishing rotating session.

Big Bend SOAR publishes an annual "SOAR Journal," which, besides more details of the program, includes acknowledgements of financial supporters. To request a copy: rjhultquist@gtmc.net. See more photos at rowesanctuary.org - also on Rowe's Facebook page (just google Rowe Sanctuary Facebook).



It isn't SOAR without "Wet & Wild!" This session was held in a backwater area of Rowe Sanctuary.



"OK Corral" was a great Plan B activity for River Day, which was played beside - rather than in - the Platte. The pistols were loaded . . . with water.



Campers learned a few things about the tools and techniques of prescribed burning from Nature Conservancy Land Steward Chris Rundstrom.



Outdoor Education at ONP

The Summer Enrichment Program for 7th & 8th-graders was held Tuesday-Thursday, June 2-4. Students from Boone Central, Spalding Academy and Albion St. Michael's School participated in

the annual event, taught by Boone Central teachers Mitch Osborn and Cheri Blocher, and retired teachers Lonnie Zrust and Mike Blocher.

The three days' enriching experiences included: a critter-finding hike through the seven ecosystems of the preserve; hearing the true story of Logan Fontenelle and his death at the hands of a Sioux hunting party on or near the preserve - and then acting out the story; a GPS (Global Positioning System) scavenger hunt; dissecting owl pellets to determine what's in an owl's diet; writing and acting out animal myths based on the creatures of ONP; learning about pioneer life by making a meal in Dutch ovens, shelling and grinding corn with antique machines and (in an afternoon session at school) making brauts and butter using a sausage stuffer and butter churn; and making sand sculptures and just playing in the river.

The Summer Enrichment program is made possible by the Albion Education Foundation and Boone Central Schools.



Enrichment students searching for critters in one of the seven ONP ecosystems - the sandhill prairie.



Good old fashioned outdoor play - frolicking in the river and fashioning sand sculptures - enriches body, mind and spirit!



The Summer Research team with the Henry Doorly Zoo-mobile. The amphibian research was done in collaboration with the Omaha zoo.

2009 Summer Research Topic:

Frog Fungus. The ongoing ONP research program for high school students, begun in 1997, is a project of science teachers Mitch Osborn (Boone Central) and Mark Seier (Newman Grove). Research topics have included flora, fish, and mammal inventories, bumblebee research, ornate box turtle tracking and oak tree studies. The aim of this year's research, which involved 25 Boone Central and Newman Grove high school students, was to determine if the deadly species of fungus, *Batrachochytrium*

dendrobatidis (Bd) is present in the frog populations of ONP and surrounding areas. Discovered in 1999, Bd has been devastating amphibian populations worldwide.

The students' work was done in collaboration with Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo. After being trained by zoo professionals for two days, the young researchers caught and sampled frogs - using cotton swabs to collect moisture from the frogs' skin - for several evenings in June and July. A total of sixty samples were collected for laboratory analysis. The students and their teachers anxiously await the results.



Frog hunting!

SOAR Aurora Camp Flight 18

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See more SOAR '09 at prairieplains.org - and view SOAR River Day on YouTube.com!



MONDAYS at Bader Park: We opened with an ambitious "Super SOAR Scavenger Scramble," where each group tried to reach as many of the 12, 3-minute lesson stations scattered throughout the Natural Area as possible. Following the Scramble, we explored the wetlands with dip nets in Wet & Wild and used sweep nets to catch spiders in the prairie. Above left - Brad Bangs, Aurora physical therapist and SOAR peer leader 1993-97, manned one station, sharing some SOAR history with the campers that managed to find him; Middle - Chris Helzer led the spider study; Top right - Kevin Ousey's group hiking the trails to find the next station; Critter shots - freshwater shrimp and crayfish discovered in the wetlands.



TUESDAYS' first stop was Grain Place Foods, where David Vetter and staff gave us the grand tour of the plant including a display of the various grains processed and packaged there (left);

Below, left to right - On to the old Danish settlement of Kronborg, where members of St. John's Lutheran Church were our hosts, giving a tour of the historic church and grounds. Of special note in the cemetery were the Gjerloff stones (see caption at bottom of page);

Happy camper Emma Sutter shows how we all felt about the aebleskiver breakfast served - and the songs sung, including "Han Skal Leve" where we lifted our glasses to "SKAL!"; and

We danced to the theme of "Christmas in July" in the finest Danish tradition.



Left: From Kronborg we went to Griffith Farm, where the "Christmas in July" theme continued in a skit based on Hertha Gjerloff Olson's "A Time Gone By," about preparing for Christmas on the Gjerloff Family's farm (present day Griffith Farm) in the early 1900s. The skit was written by students (including peer leaders) of Aurora teacher Cathie English (far right), and was performed by peer leaders. Visiting the first week's performance was Don and Gretchen Treadway (back-left and right) and daughter Ann (middle back). Gretchen is Hertha Gjerloff Olson's niece, and she shared some of her memories of the farm with us. We ended our very full morning with a picnic at Tooley Park and a plunge into the Platte.