



Summer Enrichment Camps at ONP

Twenty-five 7th & 8th- grade students from Boone Central Middle School, Albion St. Michael's School and Spalding Academy attended the annual ONP summer enrichment camp taught by local educators, May 29-31.

The first day's activities began with a hands-on session about snakes with Mark Seier, where students handled fox and bull snakes – followed by sessions on nature photography, boomerang throwing, tree identification and a theater workshop.



Cassie Olson



Cassie Olson

Left - Boone Central music teacher Whitney Jones played pioneer tunes while students made their own Dutch oven dinners on "Pioneer Day." Right - Students made their own kites - incorporating their poems into the design.

On day two, Gary Robinette from Niobrara presented some history of the Ponca Tribe. Students were then divided into groups and participated in a variety of activities throughout the day: prairie wildflowers and other vegetation provided the backdrop for "outdoor theater;" kites were built and decorated to be flown the next day; GPS instruments were used in a scavenger hunt; there were local history and other activities at the Orsord Pioneer Cemetery; and groups worked on a science problem of survival of the fittest in order to understand the reason some species survive while others don't.

The last day was Pioneer Day, including a pioneer-style lunch. Students prepared vegetables for the stew, which was cooked in cast iron

Dutch ovens. They also shelled and ground corn as the pioneers would, using antique tools supplied by Lonnie Zrust. Whitney Jones provided the live pioneer music with her "fiddle" (see photo). The camp concluded with kite-flying, geo-caching, swimming in Beaver Creek and enjoying homemade ice cream.

The 7th & 8th grade enrichment camp was made possible by teachers Mitch Osborn, Mike and Cheri Blocher, Lonnie Zrust, Cassie Olson, Whitney Jones and Mark Seier with funding from Boone Central Schools and the Albion Education Foundation. *Thanks to Mitch Osborn and Cheri Blocher for this report.*

Twenty-two fifth graders from Boone Central and St. Michael's participated in the annual ONP day camp August 8 - 9. The students enjoyed a variety of outdoor and indoor activities that centered around the preserve.

The first day's sessions included using GPS to locate caches, creating sand art stones and an exercise in observation skills called "Un-natural Trail." During the afternoon at Boone Central, campers created "camouflage insects" using clothespins, and wrote poetry.

On the second day, the students hid their created insects at ONP and challenged each other to find them. They learned that insects depend on their ability to hide in their surroundings to stay protected. A hike around the preserve introduced the group to the variety of ecosystems that can be found on the preserve: wetlands, creek, oak forest, cottonwood grove and prairie. Most of the afternoon was spent in the water searching for water critters and testing the ability to float on inner tubes in a creek that had been depleted due to drought and irrigation. Pounding leaf prints into t-shirts was a noisy - but enjoyable - afternoon session.

The fifth graders' two days of outdoor learning was made possible by teachers Mitch Osborn, Cheryl Sherburne and Nicole Sherburne, with funding from Boone Central Schools and the Albion Education Foundation.

Thanks to Cheryl Sherburne for this report.



Nicole Sherburne

Finding hidden "un-natural" objects along an otherwise natural trail sharpens observations skills.



Mitch Osborn

Dip-netting for aquatic creatures in Beaver Creek, and placing them in an aquarium for further study.



Cassie Olson

Churning butter was one of activities included in "Pioneer Cooking."



Amy Jones

July - SOAR campers hiking through Olson Nature Preserve in Boone County. In the background, a wind farm east of Petersburg. More scenes from Aurora's SOAR camp inside.


SOAR 2012
Big Bend Camp
Flight 16
 June 18-21 & June 25-28
 Serving the Buffalo and Kearney
 County area and sponsored locally by
 Rowe Sanctuary
rowesanctuary.org

From Big Bend SOAR Coordinator Jenny Hultquist:

As we met to plan SOAR this summer, we found ourselves wondering - what's the river going to be like this time? For the last three years we've had too much water in the river during SOAR so we were a bit shocked as camp approached and we barely had enough. If SOAR had been a week or two later, we wouldn't have had any! Here are some other camp highlights for 2012:

1. SOAR filled incredibly fast! We had 152 campers between the two camps and a long waiting list. We also had 14 peer leaders helping each week (a total of 20 different high school/college students).
2. Our second ever "Farm Day" was a big hit with the campers despite high winds and hot temps. Sessions included irrigation history and tools (siphon tubes, irrigation pipe and center pivots); pasture exploration; grain products; antique tools; draft horses and cow-pie tossing.
3. Some other new SOAR activities that we tried included making bug catchers out of pizza sauce cups and straws (see photo below), learning how to communicate using firefly signals and playing a plant logo identification game.
4. Finding macroinvertebrates and minnows during our wet and wild sessions was next to impossible, but we did find plenty of huge catfish and carp (see photo above, right). Campers had a blast seining (more like fish wrangling!) with Brad Eifert from Nebraska Game and Parks on River Day, and we were thrilled to finally have a fish release.

Testing our hand-crafted bug catchers.



Jenny Hultquist

5. We had some great speakers this year: Josh Mead from UNL brought many reptiles and amphibians for us to see and learn about; Jeanine Lackey from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service helped us make "prairie mud balls" loaded with seeds for planting; and Chad Johnson from NPPD brought the water turbines back for us again to actually try in the river.

2012 Big Bend SOAR planning & teaching staff: Jenny Hultquist (Coordinator), Lisa Clapper, Wendy Deyo, Stephanie Cutler, Gavin Blum, Nicole Salisbury, Keanna Leonard, Matt Jones, Lisa Brown-Olsen and Heidi LaClair.

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.

Outdoor Education
Supplement to
Prairie Plains Link
Summer, 2012

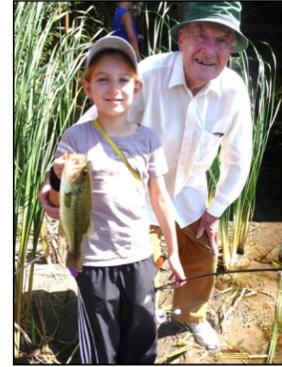


Jenny Hultquist

River Day luncheon! In this case, a carp.



MONDAYS at LAKE MARY: The 2012 theme of "SOAR Corps of Discovery" emphasized learning outdoor skills that encourage exploration and enjoyment of outdoor Nebraska. Above, campers learned canoeing basics; Amy Wilson and Renee Ekhoft used a groundwater model to teach about this precious resource. Below, from left, on-boat limnology (freshwater biology) session; a birding hike to learn bird watching skills; our host, Bud Pence with a happy camper at the conclusion of a very successful fishing experience; fish were not the only catch of the day!



SOAR 2012
Aurora Camp
Flight 21

July 9-13 & July 16-20
Serving Hamilton County & surrounding area

Enjoy more scenes from SOAR 2012:
Check out the SOAR scrapbook pages at prairieplains.org



WEDNESDAYS
at GRIFFITH
PRAIRIE & THE
PLATTE

We learned more outdoor skills at Griffith Prairie: At right, then clockwise, "This way!" - getting a handle on the compass in the orienteering session; picking up some basic camping techniques; Sarah Bailey teaching ethnobotany, the study of how people of a certain culture/region make use of native plants (the campers were later treated to samples of leadplant tea, chokecherry jelly and wild plum jam); story time in the shade of the giant cottonwoods that mark the entrance to Gjerloff Landing.



Left, exploring - and sculpting Nebraska and her rivers - in what's left of the Platte along Griffith Prairie.



All photos on this page by Prairie Plains / SOAR staff.

THURSDAYS at BADER PARK NATURAL AREA



TUESDAYS at OLSON NATURE PRESERVE in Boone County included a long hike through this Prairie Plains gem's various habitats, including Beaver Creek, oxbow wetlands, a cottonwood grove; a steep, oak-forested escarpment, Sandhills prairie and a dry, sandy ravine. Along the way we stopped for photography, poetry writing, creek exploration and a scavenger hunt. Top, from left: fish herding in Beaver Creek; Bryce and his discoveries - a bone fragment and fishing spider; peer leader Taylor Kittle assists one of her campers in photography; a lovely place for composing a poem. Below, from left: hiking through the oak forest; entering the sandy ravine (and discovering a fresh badger dig); hognose snake discovered in the ravine (a gold star on the scavenger list!); and the scenic overlook where the ghost of Logan Fontenelle (a.k.a. Jeff Gustafson) suddenly appeared to tell his story - including his death at the hands of the Sioux on or near ONP in July, 1855.

Above, from left: the hydrology session included digging a well for water in the lowland prairie. The "Tiger Swallowtails," led by Jake Parks, show how far they had to go; peer leader Paige Wergin assists one of her campers during the butterfly netting session; herpetologist David Nieves talking turtle (in this case, with a spiny softshell). Below, no fishing pole was needed to catch this largemouth bass, dip-netted in week one's Wet & Wild; and a scene from the scavenger hike in week two.

