

PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK



Creativity and teamwork were required of the Youth Naturalists to complete this woven cedar fence/sculpture on June 20 at Gjerloff Prairie. The art session was led by Jamie Horter from Lyons, Nebraska (second from right in photo). Jamie is an artist with a special interest in community-based art initiatives. The sixth annual Youth Naturalist Program (YNP) was held June 18-22 under the direction of Sarah Bailey (at right end). Jeff Gustafson (fourth from right) is Sarah's essential YNP assistant. View more scenes from YNP on the next two pages.



Happy Summer! Three annual events always mark the beginning of the season at Prairie Plains: The Fun Run/Walk at Gjerloff Prairie (Jun 2), the Sioux County Ranch Trek (June 9) and the Youth Naturalist Program (June 18-22). We are pleased to report that all went splendidly this year, and offer some scenes from each. We hope they inspire your future participation!

2018 Fun Run/Walk at Gjerloff Prairie



Front runners as race begins - in pink and blue - are Christine and Al Witkowski from Glastonbury, CT.

Three years ago Christine, Professor of Environmental Science at Middlesex Community College, began her quest to run 50 races in 50 states by age 50 (May 2020, in her case). She and her husband, Al - an aeronautical engineer for Katabasis Engineering - find the events on running websites, and chose the Prairie Plains Fun Run to represent Nebraska, state no. 31. This trip they also added Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado. The couple loves to travel, and the runs give them an opportunity to find places to which they want to return for further exploration. That, they said, includes Gjerloff Prairie, adding that "Hawaii was hard to beat, but this was one of the best!" Good to know!

2018 Sioux County Ranch Trek

(Annual gathering at Guadalcanal Memorial Prairie)

If you haven't seen northwestern Nebraska, you really haven't seen the state. And the Guadalcanal Memorial Prairie is as fine a representation of that Panhandle landscape as you'll find. Those who ventured out on June 9 to explore and enjoy the ranch - along with some great food and conversation - can confirm that! Timely rains this spring resulted in especially stunning views of the lush, green high plains environs.

In addition to our usual diehard trekkers, we welcomed several new visitors, including six who happened to be at Fort Robinson for a Nebraska Community Foundation meeting the day before. It's just a short jaunt down to Harrison from there. We don't think they have any regrets!



More scenes from the 2018 Sioux County Ranch Trek:



A favorite ranch flora trio: spiny star cactus, rusty lupine and bird's egg vetch.



Above, headwaters of the Niobrara River; below, from just west of ranch headquarters - wetlands, cottonwood grove, and the hills traditionally climbed for sunset watching.



View more scenes from the Ranch Trek on our Facebook page.



The sixth annual YNP attracted a record number (16) of budding young naturalists. The nature study and outdoor skills camp, founded and coordinated by Sarah Bailey, managed to dodge some stormy weather by switching a couple of days around, and the whole week was unanimously described as "Nailed it!"

YNP campers studied prairie ecology at Gjerloff Prairie with Bill Whitney and Sarah, and participated in a prescribed burn of the southeast restoration site there. They learned about Platte River birds on an early morning hike at Bader Park, then - armed with seines and dip nets, sampled some aquatic life in and around the Platte. A makeshift lab was set up at the Education Center at Gjerloff, where they viewed some of their findings under scopes and stocked the aquarium.

Also at Gjerloff Prairie - a mammal study led by Master Naturalist Mike Schrad, a cooperative art project directed by Jamie Horter (see top shot on page one), and camping just north of the Center.

Outdoor skills were taught by Alex Briner and Brad Bangs at Sherman Ranch, and hiking/backpacking skills were immediately put to the test as the campers explored the big river corridor prairie preserve.

Topping off the week: Kayak instruction by Celia McConkey, followed by kayaking at Pioneer Trails Recreation Area northeast of Aurora. And yes, they really nailed it!

More scenes from YNP 2018:



Charles L. Whitney Education Center Update

Fundraising:

A goal to raise \$400,000 was set in December 2017 to complete the building. We requested support from local foundations and businesses as well as our membership. The following commitments resulted:

Robert and Bethel Kolar Charitable Trust	\$ 50,000
Dr. James M. and Mabel Woodard Trust	5,000
Pinnacle Bank, Aurora	15,000
Hamilton Community Foundation	20,000
(for north deck)	
Hamilton Telephone Co.	10,000
Bernard K. and Norma L. Heuermann Foundation	25,000
Myrl S. and Bessie Evans Mather Foundation (for north deck with naming rights)	30,000
Prairie Plains Members	27,600
TOTAL GIFTS and Pledges	\$182,600

A big THANK YOU to all of these donors!

Construction:

The big news is that the north deck is nearing completion. It consists of a 50' x 12' main section over the north patio, providing a grand view over the north hill and a glimpse of the Platte Valley. Leading from this deck are two ramped bridges to the prairie north and west. The longer bridge to the north includes about 20 feet of level observation platform facing east. The deck and bridges provide emergency egress from the upper level's four north doors as well as space to mill about and sit. The patio space underneath the main deck will be a shady and inviting spot on sunny days.

Interior work is proceeding on hanging doors and tiling the lower level restrooms, to be followed by installation of plumbing fixtures. Next will be wainscot woodwork in the main activity room and kitchen, and preparing for kitchen cabinetry.



Education Center north deck/bridge construction.

Approaching Event:

Saturday night, August 11
"Planets, Perseids & Prairie" at Gjerloff Prairie

6:30 - 8:00:
Catered supper plus Center & Prairie Tours

8:00 - 9:00
"Perseids Primer / Sky Sampler"
presented by Edgerton Explorit Center's Mad Scientist and
professional sky-watcher, Dan Glomski

9:00:-11:45:
The Skywatch

RSVP required, limited to 100 participants.
janppri@hamilton.net 402-694-5535
\$15.00 per person (\$8.00 for children under 10)

In case of stormy / rainy weather, the event will be canceled.

THANK YOU'S

Fun Run: To Bill & Shirley Snyder, Scott & Cale Jones and Emma Bullerman for being event organizer Amy Jones's faithful assistants.

For Ranch Trek: To our gracious hosts, Scott & Caitlin Schaefer, and to the Longhorn Saloon in Harrison for providing baked beans and potato salad for the evening cookout.

For YNP: To our guest instructors, Mike Schrad, Jamie Horter, Alex Briner, Brad Bangs and Celia McConkey; to Renee' Ekhoﬀ & family for loaning two kayaks - and Pat Carlson at Bader Park for kayaks and binoculars; to the Aurora Mall for donating camp food; to the Merrick Foundation for scholarships and to Traver DeMaranville for a financial contribution made in memory of his late father, Rod DeMaranville.



What else has been going on? The harvest, including lots of sedges (drying, left). And the perennial battle against musk thistles (right) - in this case, at Sherman Ranch. Also, the on-going, never-ending process of invasive tree and shrub clearing - on our own properties and others'.



Education Center north deck detail.

PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK
is a publication of



Preserving, restoring and maintaining
Nebraska native prairies -
Creating opportunities for education,
research, stewardship and place-
based community development.

Prairie Plains Resource Institute is
an educational land trust
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profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt
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