

Summer, 2007

JUNE BUG CAMPOUT

“Nothing is as Unforgettable as a First Camping Experience, Especially One by Four Girls “

By Molly Postlewait, Park Naturalist



Tracks Newsletter

The year I turned sixteen, back in 1972, I invited my best friends to an overnight campout on my family’s farm in Wright County, Missouri. There were four of us, Janet, Connie, Deby and myself, a combination of “country” and “town” kids, if Manes, Mo., could be considered much of a town. It was a yearly tradition for us to get together to celebrate our June birthdays. In the spirit of unity, we called ourselves “The Junebugs.”

We chose a secluded place along the Gasconade River, which cut through our farm. High bluffs overlooked and guarded our secret hideaway, far from the annoyances of pesky little brothers. We were big girls—“grown up” and anxious to be on our own. My dad helped haul all the camping supplies, but he didn’t stay long. He left in his old truck, hurrying back for the ever present farm chores.

We busied ourselves setting up camp. The tent went up with little difficulty and the fire ring was established. After collecting an ample pile of firewood, we were anxious to let loose with a trip to the river. Even though it was spring and the river cool, we could not resist “the

call of the water.” We took turns climbing up the bluffs and jumping into the river.

I confess to being something of a daredevil—and a show-off, too. Wanting to impress my friends with my courage and daring, I climbed high up the rocky cliffs—so high that my more sensible friends begged me to come down.

Down I came, quite dramatically, feet first, plunging into the dark water. I wasn’t afraid of anything! I was “Queen of the Gasconade River!”



We played and explored all that afternoon. We had some excitement catching crawdads. I do not have the patience to sit long enough to ever be successful at fishing, but Janet was skilled at it. She soon had a stringer full of perch.

It is amazing how hungry outdoor activity will make a person. Our empty stomachs urged us to get the fire going. Now we had brought all the fixin’s of marshmallows, graham crackers and chocolate for s’mores and, of course, plenty of hot dogs for roasting. But it was the **(continued on page 2)**

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Summer Programs & Special Events

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- June 15, *Birds of Prey Amphitheater Program*
- June 22, *Snakes Alive Amphitheater Program*
 - June 29, *Twilight Hike*
- July 6 *Wildlife Who’s Who Amphitheater Program*
- July 13, *The Good, the Bad, and the Smelly Amphitheater Program*
 - July 17 & 19, *Beginning Archery*

See pages 3 and 4 for details and registration information.

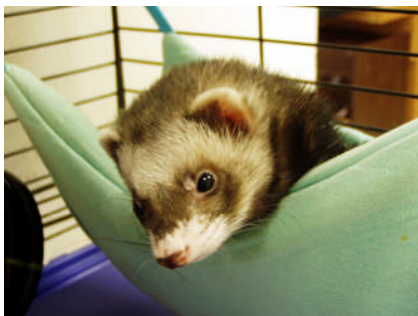
Congratulations



The JCPRD Employee of the Quarter for Seasonal Employees went to Ernie Miller Nature Center's **Kelsey Neppel**. Kelsey is the animal care-taker at the Nature Center. We thank her for all of her hard work and true dedication.

Animal News

A new ferret has been added to our program animals. His name is Romeo and he is quite the charmer. Romeo has been keeping the Nature Center's other ferret Abby very busy. He loves the rubber soles of shoes and often chases us across the room. Our ferrets are used in programs to talk about mammals and the endangered Black-footed Ferret.



Visit us on the web!

www.erniemiller.com
or
www.jcprd.com

You will find a
calendar of events, trail
map and school & group
program offerings.

(Junebug Campout continued from page 1) perch that I remember the most. We fried them in hot grease in a cast iron skillet over the campfire. There is no delicacy that can top fresh-caught fried fish. And the cleanup suited me fine: just toss the bones into the nearby brush—a quick and easy way to dispose of the bones! Deby had never roasted a hot dog over an open fire and she ate an impressive five hot dogs! I lost count of how many marshmallows I took off my stick after they turned a golden brown. As we finished our evening meal, the sun was starting to surrender its dominance. At twilight the sounds of the night began to emerge. The songs of the frogs and whippoorwills, the chirping of crickets and a far away call of a barred owl. These are comforting sounds, pleasant sounds if you grew up in the country. But for city dwellers this nocturnal serenade can be downright unsettling!

When my friends acted concerned about the darkness and the sounds of the nearby forest and river, I reassured them there was nothing to be afraid of. None of those animals would hurt us. Why, we were as safe as baby in a cradle!

The moon rose, big and full. We put more wood on the fire and gathered around its light and warmth. We talked about all the things teenagers are interested in. We talked about boys. We talked about boys we liked and boys we did not like. We talked about cute boys and gross, disgusting boys.

We also amused ourselves by manipulating our features into grotesque faces. Holding a flashlight under your chin and sticking out your tongue was a basic in campfire entertainment. But Deby was more talented. Deby had the amazing ability of pulling her eye lashes so as to turn her eyelids inside out, presenting a ghastly and ghostly spectacle. Her trick would always

bring a shocked, if not astonished, response.

But sometimes our thoughts would turn more serious, as we pondered deep questions and searched for the meaning of life. We discussed the theories of what the song "Ode to Billy Joe" was really about.

We talked late into the evening. We were laughing and having a grand ol' time when Janet held up her hand for us to hush. We heard a noise, coming from up the river. It sounded like metal scraping against rock. Then we saw a dim flicker of light. Janet and I looked at each other and grinned. We knew what it was. It was a johnboat coming down the river loaded with men on a gigging trip. "What is it?" asked Deby anxiously. "Oh, don't worry," I reassured my friends. "It's only gigger men."

"What's that?" my friends wondered. "It's just these men gigging for fish in the river," I explained.

"What's gigging?"

Patiently I related the details of the Ozark sport of gigging. "Someone shines a light on the water, looking for a big fish. When you find one, you take the gig and jab the fish. A gig is a long spear thing, with three sharp prongs. It kind of looks like a devil's pitchfork."

Now, I had never done any gigging, but this was the way it had been explained to me. And I fully expected this description to satisfy my friends' questions.

Instead, the information seemed to terrify them. An animated conversation ensued, concerning the danger approaching us in the boat.

"What if they stop the boat and come after us with the gig?"

"They wouldn't do that. They are after fish"

(continued on page 4)

Nature Center Programs

The following nature center programs may require pre-registration. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 Voice or (913) 831-3342 TDD to register unless otherwise noted. 1st price: county residents / 2nd price: non-residents. For a complete listing of programs visit www.jcprd.com or obtain a copy of the JCPRD Activities catalog found at any Johnson County Park facility or library.

PRESCHOOL

★ **Twilight Hike: (Ages 2-6 with Adult) Friday, June 29, 7-8:30 pm**
 ★ Explore the trails at Ernie Miller Park as the sun sets. Listen for the nocturnal sounds of a cricket's chorus and a barred owl's call. Gather around for stories, songs, and a tasty treat. Participants should bring a flashlight. **1-90 min. session - \$5 per person including adults (\$6 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Class code: 73-2142-016-01**

Animal Tales – Storytime (Ages 2-6 with Adult) Wednesdays, June 6 & 20 and July 11 & 25, 10:30-11 am Visit the Nature Center for stories, songs, and surprises geared to preschool children. Come listen and learn. Meet a special animal friend every time. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Pack your lunch and stay for a picnic. **1-30 min. session - \$1.75 per person (including adults) Paid at site**



Themes:
 6/6 Ants 6/20 Snakes
 7/11 Fish 7/25 Spiders

YOUTH

Archery: Beginning (Ages 8-12) Tues. & Thurs., July 17 & 19, 6:30-8:00 pm Location: TimberRidge Adventure Center 12300 Homestead Ln. Olathe, KS 66061. Experience the challenging sport of archery in this coed class designed for beginners. Safety, fundamentals, techniques, and equipment will be covered. Participants will have practice time to develop their skills. Equipment is provided. Instructor: Interpretive Staff. **2-90 min. lessons - \$24 (\$26 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Class code: 73-2124-016-012**



SUMMER DAY CAMPS

There may still be camp openings at Ernie Miller Park, TimberRidge Adventure Center and Shawnee Mission Park!
 Visit www.jcprd.com to check for availability.

FAMILY

Amphitheater Programs: Fridays, June 15 & 22 and July 6 & 13 7 p.m. (All Ages) Bring the family to the Amphitheater on Friday evenings this summer for entertainment and educational experiences. The Amphitheater is an outdoor facility with seating for approximately 150 people. During inclement weather or excessive heat, programs will be held in the Nature Center. For more information, call (913) 764-7759. Each program is approximately one hour in length and begins at 7pm. Cost: \$1.75 per person paid at site. Children age two and under are free.



Birds of Prey – June 15 By day or by night, out of the sky flies a rodent's nightmare, the birds of prey. Join our interpretive staff as

they show why rodents fear these great birds. Participants will see these magnificent raptors and their special adaptations.

Snakes Alive – June 22 Why is it that these creatures seem so terrifying? See Kansas snakes as we explore the facts and fallacies of these legless wonders of the natural world.



Wildlife Who's Who – July 6 This presentation will feature 5 live animals, representing 4 of the major groups of vertebrates and one group of invertebrates. Children of all ages will enjoy discovering the importance and habits of each animal and its place in nature.



The Good, the Bad, and the Smelly – July 13

Take a different look at some of the not-so-glamorous animals around: spiders, snakes, and skunks. These critters may not be loveable to all, but learn why they are important to our environment. Live snakes and spiders will be displayed.

Kansas City's Passport to Adventure 2007 (All Ages) Gather your family together and start your summer adventure today



with the Passport to Adventure. Take your passport to KC area natural and historical sites and get it stamped each time.

Once you have completed the passport, turn it in to a participating site by September 30 to receive a special prize. Participation is Free. Passports are available at Ernie Miller Nature Center. For more information call (913)764-7759.

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- Help with Special Events!
- Choose own hours!

Training and support will be provided. Must be at least 18 years old. Call (913) 764-8580 x 26 for more information.

(Junebug Campout continued from page 2) “I don’t like it here anymore. Let’s go back to your house”

“No, that won’t be any fun. My brother will bug us all night. There’s nothing to be worried about.”

No matter what I said, Connie and Deby were upset and worried. The whole scene seemed threatening. As the boat neared, Connie and Deby jumped into the tent. Janet and I went down to the river’s edge, hoping there might be some cute boys in the boat.

We were disappointed to discover no cute boys, only old men. We shouted hello and exchanged greetings. We asked if they were having any luck and Janet told about our perch dinner. They laughed and, without stopping, floated on down the river.

Back at the camp, my friends were still concerned, but not so concerned as to pass up another round of s’mores. Conversation continued, and we soon forgot about the gigger men.

It was very late when we finally retired to the tent. “Shouldn’t we arm ourselves?” Connie asked. We all agreed that was a good idea. All we had for weapons was a hatchet for chopping wood and a cast iron frying skillet. All these items plus the green flashlight were brought into the tent. It took a bit for us to settle down and get comfortable in our flannel plaid sleeping bags. After some time our conversation ceased and all was quiet.

That’s when I first heard it. Softly it came, movement in the woods, the sound of something walking in the dry leaves. Probably a deer, I thought, but now suddenly I was very alert. Every muscle in my body was tense and I strained to hear every sound.

Connie was lying next to me. She cupped her hands and whispered into my ear, “It’s the gigger men!” We

looked at each other, terrified.

I shook my head and brought my finger to my lips for quiet. Then I began to imagine what was making so much noise. What was it? What could it be? My heart was pounding! Maybe it was a bear. Whatever it was it was big. And now it was boldly walking right through our camp. A chewing sound could be heard out by the campfire.

My friends stared at me as if I should do something. But I lay motionless. All that bravado I had had earlier had disappeared. That “I’m Queen of the Gasconade River” was gone and had been replaced with my wild imagination.

We lay there, wide-eyed and wondering what or who dared come into our campsite. We were suspended in a torturous state. Each one of us envisioned the situation and our fate.

Connie was certain the gigger men had returned. And she expected at any time for the devil-pronged gig to pierce through the canvas tent and impale us all.

Janet speculated the intruder was an escaped convict. This was the same escaped convict with a hook for one hand, known to terrorize teenagers parked on Lovers Lane.

Deby’s head was filled with the most recent issue of *National Enquirer* reports of Bigfoot encounters. Now I had never heard of Bigfoot coming into the Ozarks. But I did think the sounds could be from the MO MO monster, a fearsome creature said to gut hogs and rip the heads off chickens to drink their blood. MO MO was seen occasionally by lone hunters and rumored to rattle the doors of old widow women. Yes, it was surely a MO MO monster, and we might be its next meal. Perhaps it was preparing to tear us limb from limb.

We lay perfectly still, frozen in terror. It seemed as if we were held hostage with fear, not knowing what to do. Fortunately, a slight movement within the tent caused the creature to run away.

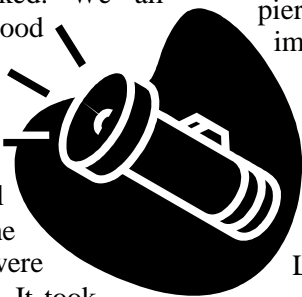
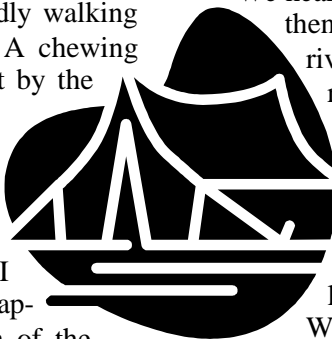
We heard a shuffling sound and then a splash down by the river. With the enemy in retreat, at last we sprung into action. Armed with hatchet, skillet, and flashlight and screaming as only 16-year-old girls can, we leaped out of the tent. We ran to the edge of the river, hoping to get a glimpse of the villain. We could see a sinister, dark form swimming near the far bank. The flashlight scanned the muddy bank of the river and there we saw what had caused such fear. A fat, wet raccoon emerged from the river and continued on its nocturnal rounds.

We were shocked and speechless at first. Then we began to laugh. We felt somewhat foolish. This innocent little rascal had caused our heart to pound and brought a lump of fear to our throats. We had been duped by the animal some call the little bandit.

Later, in the safety of reflection, we surmised that it was our housekeeping techniques of throwing the fish bones into the bushes that prompted our midnight visitor. And the chewing sounds were that of the raccoon gnawing on the marshmallow sticks that we had left by the fire.

It was Einstein who said imagination is more important than intellect. We proved that imagination was certainly more powerful than our common sense the night of the Junebugs’ camp out.

“June Bug Campout” will be published in the May issue of The Ozarks Mountaineer Magazine.





Mud Pies



Nature activities for pre-schoolers
By Molly Postlewait and Andrea Johnson, Park Naturalists

NATURE ACTIVITY

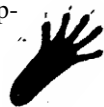


For more than twenty years now, the raccoon has served as the Ernie Miller Nature Center mascot. Although raccoons like to hide in the day, we often see where he has traveled. Paw prints in the mud along Little Cedar Creek tell a story of this nocturnal animal.

Raccoons come to the creek to catch their next meal. With their agile paws and superior survival skills, raccoons are able to catch a midnight feast of crayfish and frogs. The raccoon's habit of rinsing his food before eating makes him a frequent visitor to the streams and ponds. This habit is explained, not by the raccoons' cleanliness, but by the absence of saliva in a raccoon's mouth. Dipping food into the water gives them moisture, making the food easier to eat.

Raccoons have a distinctive feature on their face. The black mask around the raccoon's eyes is a clever disguise, nature's way of making it difficult for enemies to locate the pupils of his eyes. Raccoon's tail has alternate gray and black rings around it. Raccoon is one of the most recognizable critters around. Most everyone has a good raccoon story, as they are famous for the raiding campgrounds and exploring the neighborhood trash cans.

We invite you to visit Ernie Miller Nature Center and Park. As you hike the woods perhaps you'll see possible dens or tracks of these fascinating creatures. Maybe you might be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of this night time wanderer as he looks for his next meal.



LITTLE CEDAR READER Children's Literature Corner

Bullfrogs sing and night birds call
As little raccoon climbs down from his tree so tall

Quietly sneaking the hungry raccoon
Travels thru the forest by the light
of the moon



Down by the creek for a tasty treat
Raccoons catch crayfish and frogs so yummy to eat

NATURE CRAFT

Raccoon Mask



Use strip of black material or paper to create a mask just big enough to cover your eyes, cut out holes for sight, then tie around head with string. As you and your child wear this mask you will look much like the raccoon. Pretend to be sleeping in a tree, walking through the forest, catching crayfish or frogs, and washing your hands before dinner.

THANK YOU'S



Thank you to **Bushnell** for their generous donation of 3 pairs of binoculars to the Nature Center. These binoculars were used in the 2007 Birding Fiesta and will continue to be utilized in programs.

Pictured right are Bushnell's Alysia Helming and Bill McGowan, JCPRD Outdoor Education Manager.



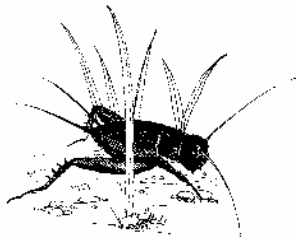
The staff at Ernie Miller Nature Center would like to extend a special thank you to the **Olathe Animal Hospital**. We appreciate all of their continued support in the care of the animals at the Nature Center.

We would also like to thank the Blue Valley ACCESS Program for their donation of supplies for animal care at the Nature Center.

Ernie Miller Nature Park

Nature's Corner Gift Shop at the Ernie Miller Nature Center

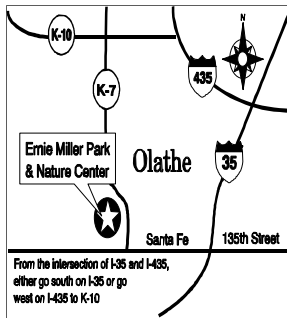
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Ernie Miller Nature Center
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sex, religion, age and handicapped
status in employment of the provision
of programs and services.*

Hours

Monday—Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed from 12-1pm for lunch
Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed Sundays June, July & August

Winter hrs. run from Nov. 1 to Mar. 11
(close at 4:30)

**Park trails open every day
dawn to dusk**



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**ERNIE MILLER
NATURE CENTER**

JOHNSON COUNTY
PARK & RECREATION
DISTRICT

