

Walker Valley REFLECTIONS

The newsletter of Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont • Fall 2005

Firsts

Firsts accumulate quickly at Tremont

by Josh Davis

Firsts are exciting. A first has special meaning for people, something to be celebrated, remembered, and likely an occasion to get out the camera. Firsts are, as one might expect, concentrated toward the beginning of a person's life. Proud parents dutifully record baby's first tooth, first step, and first word. Even if that enthusiasm is lost on the birthday boy or girl, locks of hair are saved from the first haircut, and first birthdays are celebrated with great enthusiasm. This is as it should be. Firsts are exciting.

Through childhood, the firsts may come rather less often, though are no less thrilling. First day of school, first two-wheeler, first lost tooth. This summer, I was fortunate enough to be present on many first occasions of all sorts at the Tremont summer camps. For some of our campers this year, it was their first time away from home, or their first time at a camp. For many, this may have been their first visit to the Smoky Mountains.

Throughout a camper's time here at Tremont, the firsts accumulate rapidly. The first dip in the Middle Prong is a very memorable (and sometimes chilly) experi-

ence. There are first salamanders and crawdads, first millipedes and skunks. First all day hike, and first solo hike. First time sleeping in a tent, and first time peeing in the woods. For a lucky few, there were first bears, and if the bear was seen during



the busy traffic snarls in Cades Cove, first "bear jams."

Some firsts are especially exhilarating, even as firsts go. Recently, a group of high school seniors with the Gear Up Grad program spent a week at Tremont. On a

hike along Lumber Ridge, we encountered a good-sized timber rattlesnake. This was, for most, the first rattler they had ever seen, and perhaps their first venomous snake. Adding to the thrill was the realization that all nine of the seniors, one staff, and several adults walked right by the snake without even seeing it. The rattlesnake was merely inches off the trail.

From an educator's standpoint, the important first in this encounter was not only the snake itself, but the chance to help the students discover for the first time that snakes are not "mean" or "out to hurt us." The rattler remained curled right where it was as the group passed by, and only started to move when the group stopped to look at it. Even then, it only moved a foot or so off the trail, rattled a few times, and then seemed unperturbed as the students took pictures from a safe distance.

Of course, there are other stories. Tremont's Naturalist Expeditions camp is an 11-day experience in the Smokies, during which the students are completely immersed in science and nature. This summer, we were fortunate to be able to work

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From the Executive Director

Making memories

This past June, we reflected as a staff on the many ways that we could, and certainly would, affect people's lives over the summer. Through helping them experience the diversity, mystery and wonder of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, we would provide the catalyst for creating remarkable memories that would expand and hopefully enrich their lives.

Throughout this newsletter you will read about some of those experiences, memories, and insights. In doing a quick rewind of all that happened at Tremont this summer, I am amazed at how much was packed in. Students worked with scientists and caught hellbenders, which they tagged and released. College students stood on a mountaintop and watched the clouds part after a thrilling summer thundershower and hailstorm. Backpackers got wet, sweaty, dirty and tired, but at the end of the day rejoiced in the feeling of accomplishment and oneness with the mountains and the trail. Campers found an ancient spear point as they sifted dirt with archaeologists in Cades Cove. Adults and teachers played the part of scientist, explorer, naturalist and playful child. This is a very brief glimpse of the rewind through our summer and what memories the Smokies created for us. Connecting people and nature was accomplished in countless ways.

An important book was released earlier this year that speaks to the relevance and necessity of connecting people (especially children) and nature today. I highly recommend reading Richard Louv's *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. Richard describes a disconcerting societal shift in how children experience the world around them. Instead of climbing trees, fishing, tromping through the woods, building forts and catching frogs, most children remain inside or do not have the same kinds of opportunities that they did 30 years ago. He cites numerous reasons, such as liability concerns, lack of vacant lots, wooded areas, and ponds in our neighborhoods, overly busy family schedules, the attraction of electronics, and media exposure that has created a "bogyman syndrome." One

child that he interviewed summed up his concern when he said, "I like playing inside because that is where the electric outlets are."

This book is not just about connecting people to nature to help nature itself. It is about the need that we as people have for nature ourselves. We need nature because we are a part of nature. Connecting people to nature as I have always viewed it means more than just getting people and nature

the richness of the human experience. Yet, at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature in positive ways."

At Tremont we have long understood these ideas, but hopefully Louv's book will awaken a wider audience to the larger consequences that we might suffer as a

Rapidly advancing technologies are blurring the lines between humans, other animals, and machines. The post-modern notion that reality is only a construct suggest limitless human possibilities; but as the young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow, physiologically and psychologically, and this reduces the richness of the human experience.

—Richard Louv, *The Last Child in the Woods*

together. It is about reconnecting with nature and recognizing that people are not apart from nature but an integral part of it. Many of our environmental problems are a result of our estranged relationship, where we view things through the lens of people or nature instead of as a relationship where we are part of a greater whole.

Richard Louv writes, "Our society is teaching young people to avoid direct experience in nature. That lesson is delivered in schools, families, even organizations devoted to the outdoors, and codified into the legal and regulatory structures of many of our communities.... Rapidly advancing technologies are blurring the lines between humans, other animals, and machines. The postmodern notion that reality is only a construct suggests limitless human possibilities; but as the young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow, physiologically and psychologically, and this reduces

result of eliminating opportunities for people to experience nature firsthand. We are preparing for and anticipating the learning and experiences that will happen as school groups join us this fall. Plans are already developing for our 2006 schedule of workshops, classes and summer experiences. Meanwhile, you can be assured that we are expanding opportunities for people young and old to connect with nature in memorable ways. Great Smoky Mountains National Park is our classroom. It is one of those important places so desperately needed today where people and nature are linked, or as Robert Pyle wrote, "places of initiation, where the borders between ourselves and other creatures break down, where the earth gets under our skin."



Executive Director

Firsts

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with the University of Tennessee Archaeological Field School, at a site in Cades Cove. During the dig, one camper found a spear point dating back approximately 5,000 years. Certainly a first for all of us.

All of these firsts were celebrated with enthusiasm, both from the campers and the staff. These moments are one of many reasons that I feel fortunate to be in the field of environmental education. Sharing a first with someone, child or adult, is perhaps as exciting for me as it is for them.

It seems that as most folks reach adulthood, the firsts are fewer still, and are greeted with less anticipation. There are exceptions, of course. First cars, first jobs,

and first anniversaries are all noteworthy occasions. Later in life, there may be first kids and first grandkids. But for many people, there just don't seem to be as many firsts to celebrate.

Nature lovers may be an exception to this rule. We celebrate firsts of all kinds. The first time a bird species is seen, or first flower species. The first time on a trail, or a peak. In fact, nature lovers take their fervor for firsts to such a degree that they record them as dutifully as proud parents. Birders keep life-lists, where they record all of their birding firsts. Hikers keep trail maps, highlighting the trails they have tackled.

For myself, I think the thrill that comes from a first is a truly wonderful thing. It can open our eyes to the world around us and allow us to view our sur-

roundings from a fresh perspective. As adults, we should challenge ourselves to continue to seek out firsts, and rejoice in them with the same wonder as we did when we were younger. New plants, new trails, and new places are out there to be discovered.

Even better, don't just seek out firsts; seek out new ways to enjoy old firsts. It's easy, sometimes, to take things for granted when they seem commonplace. This happens to all of us. The mountains are no less beautiful than they were when I first saw them, though sometimes I fail to appreciate them. Taking pleasure in an old friend, human or otherwise, should be just as enjoyable as the first time you met them. We should strive to celebrate firsts, new and old, every day. As they should be.

Firsts, after all, are exciting.

Forging Connections

Summer mountain memories

"Mary, I want you to promise me that you'll come back to this spot sometime before the summer ends." It was the last morning of Naturalist Week, and the folks on the nature walk I was attending weren't ready to leave. Life away from Tremont was beginning to loom large and ugly in everyone's thoughts, and when a bend in the trail led us past the ideal riverside picnic spot, one hiker realized that she wouldn't be enjoying any wilderness lunch breaks for quite some time. Leaving the Smokies was going to be tougher than she could have foreseen a week ago, and though I understood her pain, I was also glad to see that she had established such a strong relationship with this place. I told her I'd pack a sandwich in her honor and hike back for another visit the first chance I got.

Working this summer as an outdoor educator in the place I love, I have been privileged to watch as participants of all ages came to know the mountains on their own terms and forge some

unique connections. Whether campers simply became more comfortable in the woods as a fun place to explore, gained a deeper understanding of the area's natural history, or even considered taking steps toward protecting the Smokies, it was incredible to see such bonds develop. After the summer ends and I leave the mountains again, I will remember moments like these:

A nine-year-old Discovery camper who has never been away from home before is having a great time hunting for salamanders. He catches a particularly tiny one in a zip-lock bag, runs up and down the banks to show all of his friends and counselors, and then begins inching his way along the stream, painstakingly examining each rock and pool. When asked what he is doing, he replies, "I have to get this little guy back home to the place he knows."

A Naturalist Expeditions group is hiking in the high country on a misty day. Every breath we take smells of Christmas trees and damp moss, and the unearthly



Les McClasson

sounds of veery and winter wren calls fill our ears. We stop for a taste of yellow birch twigs, and as the campers enjoy their backwoods chewing gum, one girl remarks, "This place is so different from anywhere I've ever been. I feel like I'm in Candyland!"

I'll remember Wilderness Adventure Camp backpackers relaxing at the top of Gregory Bald, making pictures in the sunset clouds and playing tag. I'll remember the group that couldn't walk ten feet down the trail without finding something new to share, the group that spontaneously stopped talking just to lis-

ten to the approaching rain in the treetops, the group that finished a night hike in complete darkness without once turning on a flashlight. I'll remember the faces of kids finishing their solo hikes. And finally, of course I'll remember doing one last granola-bar-wrapper check with my Naturalist Expeditions group before heading back around that bend in the trail away from the riverside picnic spot we had enjoyed so much. We wanted to leave it looking as inviting as it had when we arrived, so somebody else might stop and get to know it too.

—Mary Silver

The Land Before Time

A Hike to Albright Grove

by Mickey Larkins

The day started and ended with rain. An incredible hike to Albright Grove was sandwiched in between the rains. The rain, the mists, the giant trees, and lush vegetation all added to the mystery and aura surrounding this old growth area of the park. When you enter an area such as this, everything around you seems more vibrant

and alive, maybe because the rain freshens the air and glistens on every leaf and plant.

What rewards await voyagers to this land before time? The giant hemlocks, poplars, sugar maples, silverbell trees, some with girths that take six or seven people to encircle; all bear testimony to the timelessness of nature compared to the time

allowed humans on this orb called Earth. Surrounded by huge downed logs covered with mosses and a variety of ferns, fungi, and other plants too numerous to mention, one is left to contemplate the breathtaking canvas of Mother Nature's painting. It is a picture of life upon life connected to everything around you. You feel as if you must walk lightly on the land so as not to

disturb anything. All that might appear to be missing in one's imagination might be a plant-eating dinosaur or two sticking their heads up out of the mist.

When I am granted a visit to such a place, I feel as if I'm in God's outdoor cathedral. I feel reverence toward every sight and sound of this creation, and a profound sense of calm surrounds my soul. My pack suddenly feels very light and my senses seem very acute. I see small details in the flora and the fauna that speak to me along with every new birdcall I hear. I say one silent prayer after another as I walk slowly along, measuring each step. I know this loop well, so I know soon I will start back down toward the other world we all must live in. All too soon, my group and myself reach the end of our hike for this day. Nevertheless, we take with us memories that will last a lifetime.

All of what I have described can be yours for the taking if you allow yourself to unplan some of life's chores. The circle of life plays out every day in the land before time. Albright Grove calls to all of us if only we will tune out all of our man-made machines and listen to the quiet, still voices of the creation.



Keri Voorhis

The giant hemlocks, poplars, sugar maples, silverbell trees—some with girths that take 6 or 7 people to encircle—all bear testimony to the timelessness of nature compared to the time allowed humans on this orb called Earth.

As the Earth Rotates

Late spring, early summer weather synopsis

It never ceases to amaze me how quickly the seasons change, or should I say how quick it seems to me, from one to the next. We had all been so excited about the up-coming spring and now it has passed and the shades and hues of autumn are on the horizon. The past few months have not yielded any significant weather related events here in Walker Valley. The month of May was close to average in both temperature and rainfall. Thankfully we didn't receive any major flooding like what happened in May of 2003 (6 in./48hrs). The lack of rainfall in June was actually really helpful this year at least for myself and other Wilderness Adventure Campers who last year had to swim through days upon days of rain in the backcountry of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The lack of rainfall ended in the month of July with a few significant rainfalls from tropical depression Dennis. The beautiful Middle Prong looked like the river from Willy Wonka, chocolate in color, but moving with much more ferocity. As the earth rotates we will keep you up-to-date here in Walker Valley. —Michael Matzko

	May	June	July
<i>Average high</i>	77° F	85° F	87° F
<i>Average low</i>	49° F	62° F	66° F
<i>Rain</i>	2.6 in.	5.0 in.	7.4 in.
<i>Snow</i>	0 in.	0 in.	0 in.

Biting the Hand that Won't Feed You

Hellbender bites leave a good mark

by Terence O'Neill

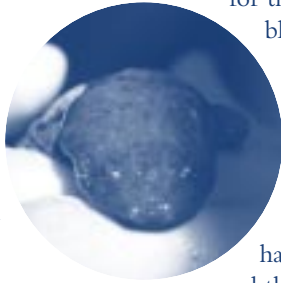
A challenge that has cropped up again and again as I have worked this summer as an environmental education intern is what I can do to fulfill the motto of the Institute here at Tremont: "Connecting People and Nature." When I arrived I was fully prepared to cloud this relationship with my own baggage; baggage about how I had to learn how to teach and baggage about how I didn't know the first thing about wildlife, baggage about me and myself and things related to I. But as the summer progressed, a systematic dismantling of these worries took place for very necessary reasons. Not because they were unfounded, but because the times that became the most rewarding were directly informed by the moment, not by a book, and that brought me down to the level of the kids and the bugs, not celebrating myself as incurious expert.

One day during the Water Ecology Naturalist Expedition, Mary Silver, Mickey Larkins, and I took a group of six students down to see the Hellbender researchers

work in the Middle Prong. The afternoon was very hot, the water very cold, and we were right perfect in the middle with our wetsuits. I was happy because I could float for the first time, aided by the spongy black suit clinging to my skin; the kids were happy because it turned out that we were all justified in struggling into these cumbersome outfits. The water was cool enough to keep us from overheating from the hard work of not washing away, and the sun baked us dry when we emptied out to see what our hosting researchers had discovered.

It turned out to be a good day for science as well. They found three Hellbenders, all new to their studies, indicating that the population of these large Salamanders was doing well. The largest of the three was seventeen inches long and possessed a mean disposition, wiggling fruitlessly from the time of its catch until it was dropped into its holder bag and lowered back underwater.

The researchers called us all over when they were ready to insert the tracker bug



into the flesh of the animal. I had never held a Hellbender and wanted to feel what it was like. Dr. Freake handed the salamander to me and I fought to keep it from slipping free and down on the rocks—it was determined to loose itself from my grasp—but I was just quick enough to keep it. I kneeled down to lessen the impact if it did shake free; the researchers collapsed towards me to relieve me of its charge. I looked up, look back down, and the Hellbender opened its mouth and bit down on the end of my left index finger. At first I was surprised that it had bitten me, then for the pain that came with the bite, and finally for the fact that it had yet to let go. I yelped and it opened its jaws again; I relinquished the feisty salamander back to its handlers and examined my new wound.

Oooooohs and Aaaaaahs were heard from the kids as the blood began to flow down my palm. I rinsed the hand off in the quick flowing water of the river and heeded the advice of my partner counselor Mary Silver in heading up to the van to get it wrapped. "They don't usually bite—We've never seen that happen before!" exclaimed the researchers. "You can still see the blood in its mouth. AWESOME!" shouted a camper.

After I got bit, I immediately recognized how cool this was, these things never bite anyone, but also how valuable it was. "Just goes to show you, it's a wild animal that we have disturbed in its habitat, we can't blame it for defending itself—I'd be pretty mad if you scooped me up during lunch time, too." The kids seemed to understand that this was not a case where anyone was in the wrong, that the researchers accepted a certain risk in dealing with any wild animal. My bite was just a small part of the give and take of gaining valuable information on how the Hellbenders live. For the kids, it was unadulterated action; it was in their life, biting their counselor, a chance to see a rare animal in a special place do something it almost never does.

We resumed our free floating and Hellbender hunting, me with my hand raised above my head to keep the blood from rushing into and out of my hand and finger, but the whole afternoon resonated with us all for the last few days. I already harbor great feelings for my memory, and I know a few of the kids will, as well. I'm just lucky enough that nature went ahead and gave us the lesson, the memory, right there, accessible and entertaining.



Fondest Family Memories

The goal was a great mix of dirt, rain, and campfire smoke

by Kent Jones

What are your fondest family memories? For me, it is the many camping trips we took to the mountains. Over the years when I was a boy, our family made “regular” camp trips throughout the year. Some in the spring, some in the fall and, yes, even in the frigid winter!

For a child growing up in East Tennessee, it was a pleasure to scrounge around the homeplace gathering the camping equipment; tents, sleeping bags, boots, food and coolers. At the time, we had four in our family. My brother, Dad, Mom and myself would pile into the overloaded car, which included our family best friend—the dog. Off we would go to adventure forest and trail. Adventure it was!

Our favorite place to camp was the East Tennessee mountains. This was rough camping we chose to do—no facilities. We camped to get really dirty and reek of campfire smoke. We would try to camp in a favorite small pine forest about three miles into a nearby reserve. It was a popular spot because of the dense shelter and cool shade it offered. We had purchased a huge family cabin-type tent made of heavy-duty canvas. It was comfortable once we got the mammoth tent up, but we often had to haul it a distance to get it

to the pine forest. It was definitely not made to be hauled. It weighed a ton!

The family pet was a mixed bird dog. He had a great personality and was a daring breed. In the cold mornings I would find him fast asleep on top of the hot coals of the previous night’s campfire. I’ll never, to this day, figure out how he didn’t get burned. Ah, such memories.



As a boy, I never realized all the trouble it was for my parents to take time off from work and to stop the usual, switch gears, and do the fun, rough camping I loved so dearly. Today, with my own family, I cringe at the thought of dragging all of the camping equipment out, especially since I have five children. But hey, there’s always a silver lining to each grey cloud, right? In our back yard, or not too far down the road from your place, is Tremont.

Today’s demands on mom and dad are, to say the least, taxing. Most of the time we are searching to call up the energy to spend quality time with our children. Tremont takes the call and helps you do that very thing. Spend quality time and create a memorable learning experience this fall at the next Family Adventure Camp, September 23 through 25.

In it Together

Forging rewarding new friendships

It was time for the all-day hike during the first week of Discovery camp. Our spirits were high with the anticipation and excitement of what we were going to encounter and might find along the way. For others however, the thoughts were not as aloft, for they may have had fears and anxiety of what was going to happen. The unknown is always a scary thing, especially for a child who is far from what they know as safe like Mother or Father or Grandma or Grandpa. For one camper it was just that. It was the second-to-last day of the week, and she was ready to get the hugs from mom. We as staff try to encourage and moti-

vate the campers as much as possible. This is when my favorite moment of camp happened.

I remember one of the campers and I became friends pretty early on in the week. We found that we had a lot in common; we liked some of the same songs we grew up with, and participated in some of the same sports. That connection with the campers is always important. I want them to know that they have not only a counselor for the week but a friend.

As the time drew nearer for the all-day hike, we were pretty excited and ready to go. Singing the songs we both knew and observing the surrounding beauty kept us pretty distracted at what was coming ahead on the trail. The trail started to take a turn—a turn upward. No one likes to hike uphill; gravity will not let us do that comfortably. That is

Family Adventure Camp in the Smokies is a time for kicking back the cares and ramping up valuable family time. All of the distractions will be gone. Turn off the cell phone and put away the Game Boy. Mom won’t even have to cook! We don’t have to drag tents and stoves, and yet the family gets to stay in one of the nation’s most beautiful parks. Tremont is an all-inclusive family getaway. It’s also a great value at only \$300 for a family of four and only \$70 for each additional family member. In my opinion, you can’t take the family to Pigeon Forge for a weekend and spend \$300 and come away calling it a vacation. A Pigeon Forge weekend does *not* count as “going to the mountains.” Come on, you have to get a combination of a little mountain dirt, rain, and campfire smoke to be considered being in the mountains.

My fondest family memories are of these mountains and camping here. We often talk about those trips today. The smells, the sounds, the hikes and fording of streams...the feeling of cold morning air as it began to be warmed by the sun, which dawned and crested the peak it was hiding behind the night before...chasing my dog down a fire-break as I explored where, I just *knew*, no man had ever stepped foot...the occasional horse-rider...the look of pleasure on my parents’ faces that said, “we’re getting away from it all”...and the time to drench the soul with nature. It was a time to be family, and family we are.

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For more information on a Family Adventure Weekend in September call 865-448-6709 and go to our website at www.gsmi.org.

when the singing stopped and more attention was put into each step. Legs got tired and sweat started to drip from all over. Thoughts of Mom and Dad came rolling in as well. I remember encouraging and helping her out as much as possible. It was hard for both of us, but with the encouragement and knowing we were in it together, we made it to our rest stop. And boy, we sure enjoyed that rest!

The most rewarding moment happened when she told me, “Thank you.” I thought to myself that this is what it is all about: a personal friendship that can be created and strengthened by hardships is what pushes us to be reliant on each other. We all go through steep grades and rough terrain in life, but when we reach out to others, we see that we are all in it together. —Katie Stammer



Out of the Woods and Back Again

Tales from the trail
by Adam Haigler

It's hard to tell one experience that led to me falling in love with nature, so I will recount a handful of stops along my journey. As all human stories do, this one starts with childhood, a teacher, and the creek behind my house. (Maybe all human stories don't start with these, but they should.) When I was growing up in suburbia, I was unaware of the world environmental situation, but knew that I had paradise behind my house. With an older brother and sister who loved being outside just as much as I did, it was easy for me to enjoy the out-of-doors all that much more. The creek behind my house had massive slabs of granite in addition to dark tunnels, snakes, frogs, and plenty of trees and places to hide all around it. We would spend all day out there exploring the wonders it held for young children. Going through the pitch black tunnels provided ample challenge for courage and grossness

toleration. You would no doubt run into some big spiderwebs before reaching the other side, which was comparable to another world. Different trees and plants surrounded the other end of the tunnel, making it even more spectacular after the contrast from darkness to light. We dug huge holes on the other side of the creek and planted our time capsules, which we still haven't dug up. We now know that in that hole lies our childhood, along with the trinkets of the 90s. We also created a bike trail next to the creek, which was my main hangout when I got old enough to ride. I tracked mud into my house for a few years from the construction projects I was a part of in my own backyard.

The creek was my teacher before the formal schooling began, but when it did, I continued along my path to the tree huggers. Mrs. Cox was almost a deity to me because she taught her students in such a

way that it didn't feel like we were being forced to learn anything. She was my first grade teacher and still sticks out in my mind as my favorite. In her class, she somehow inspired me to become obsessed with birds and other animals. We actually had a few monarch caterpillars in our classroom that we fed until they decided to create their crysalis inside our classroom. We watched the entire life process happen there in our own classroom and got to hold them while their wings dried after emerging from the crysalis. The appreciation for the beauty of nature started officially at that point. When I got older this love lay dormant, but I found it again after high school.

By the end of my schooling career I was beginning to get back to my true home more often. After avidly mountain biking, I started enjoying just getting out without wheels and ended up going on two backpacking trips that turned me back to my path. My most inspirational trip was the one to the Big Creek area right after my graduation. After 13 years of being told where to go and what to learn in a structured school environment, the Smokies gave me the freedom for which I had unknowingly yearned. I was headed "back to the woods" in my life, and I made a stop in New Jersey for a survival school. The school opened my mind and heart to the world I was living in, and during my final night there the visionary and president of the school, Tom Brown Jr., spoke to the class. What he said that night made my life's decision clear: "Heal Earth Mother." At this impressionable time in my life, his school made all the difference.

So I had the theory of loving nature milling in my heart and mind, but had not had all that many "wow" moments in my life until I headed to New Zealand to work outside all day, everyday, for one purpose: Heal Earth Mother. Although the organization I worked for didn't do conservation exactly as I would have, its intentions and vision were flawless and noble. I walked through the rainforest every day doing whatever work needed to be done to make our ecosystem stronger and more beautiful. The act of giving oneself completely to the desire to heal was very meaningful to me. On one of my days off I unexpectedly found a "wow" moment off the trail along a river in the rainforest. As I followed the water downstream on the limestone clay riverbed, I came to a con-

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Out of the Woods

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siderably steep rapid area with moss on the smooth rock. I stepped meticulously in order to avoid being washed away with the current, but at one point lost my footing and slid with the current for more than ten feet until I was caught gently by a pool at the bottom. Had I really just accidentally found a waterslide in the middle of a forest? I had to verify the finding, so I headed back up and went back down a few times, laughing uncontrollably. The rest of the day was spent exploring other waterslides in a mile-long stretch along my secret amusement park. My deep appreciation for the beauty and playing grounds in nature grew exponentially from that point on—a crystallization of all my theories and feelings of nature culminated in a waterslide. As Ben Okri, an African author, writes, “Don’t despair too much if you see beautiful things destroyed, if you see them perish. Because the best things are always growing in secret.” After an extended peri-

od of travelling, and then working in Texas, I felt the Smokies calling me back.

This summer has been a blessing. I have had more than my share of “wow” moments in a short and busy time. I have been so inspired by this place and its people that I have been on a sort of creative binge since I arrived. Seeing a bear cub in a forest and sensing its emotions inside me was a memorable experience that rises to my mind, but I would have to say that my favorite morning of the summer was fairly recent. I was awakened at 5:30 a.m. one morning, and as I lay there I was suddenly urged by some other power to get up and head down to the river. At about 6:15, I strolled down and waded through the ford as I had numerous times before, but this morning held something unexplainable, mysterious. I stood on the rock that I usually use as a jumping platform and was overtaken with the trees and sounds surrounding me. As I stood there, I felt the goosebumps growing all over me but could not distinguish where they came from—was it the cool freshness in the air

or the surroundings in which I was enveloped? While my thoughts flowed with the river, I spoke one of them aloud: “I gotta get back to this place.” This morning refreshed and reawakened my soul and put my life in perspective, but I dare not attempt to explain how. The river flowed through my pen and inspired a poem:

*I choose to flow with you today
River, God
May I flow with you always?
For the stagnant pools of society bring me no
refreshment nor joy
Slimy, Stinking, Static
I won't be caught in the undercurrents of
strife
Nor dammed by its concrete blasphemy
For the Om lies within you River
Just as I will
One day the world will understand you and
live in your image
We will flow powerfully around and eventu-
ally through any obstacle
Winding to our own oceans*

The Joy of Teaching

Learning from students while they learn from you

There is nothing more exhilarating than knowing you helped a child connect with nature in a way they never had before. This summer, I was fortunate enough to be the George W. Fry Chair for Science Education. Throughout this summer, I have not only worked with the ATBI and Citizen Science projects, but also with various camps.

My favorite camp to work with was Naturalist Expeditions. This was the smallest group that I worked with, but I felt the most accomplished at the end of the session that I co-led. Two other staff members and I taught Biodiversity in the Smokies.

Before camp actually started, I spent several hours with Terence and Mary planning the Biodiversity program. We scheduled three days packed full of activities that hopefully would give the kids an idea

of how diverse the Smoky Mountains are. After final preparations were made, we eagerly awaited the campers' arrivals.

Finally, it was time. This was it. After all of the planning and anticipating, the campers arrived and I waited to see how the lesson would come together. We jumped right into Biodiversity and before long, the kids couldn't wait to share their knowledge with the group.

By the end of the first day, I was thrilled! The campers all seemed to be incredibly enthralled in the Smokies. The lessons had gone better than I could have imagined. Everyone was excited to begin the next day's activities.

The second day went as well as if not better than the first. The campers' eyes lit up every time they learned something new

about the mountains or biodiversity. They constantly talked about how much they were learning. I was talking with one of the boys during a hike and he told me, “You guys are doing a great job! I've learned so much already and it's only the second day!”

Hearing him say that made all of the effort well worth it. It helped me to realize just how much of a difference I am able to make in a child's life. I didn't feel like we were doing anything special; we were just sharing our passion for nature. In sharing that passion however, Mary, Terence, and I helped give these campers a sense of place in the Smokies.

I will never forget one of the young ladies from this expedition. Every time we asked a question, she was the first one to raise her hand to give the answer. She knew something about almost all of the topics we covered. It was great to see how much knowledge she had, but at times I felt that we could not possibly teach

her anything new. Towards the end of the Biodiversity Expedition, I heard her saying, “Wow! I just can't believe how much stuff is really out here!”

Knowing that I was able to help teach someone who seemed to know everything a new lesson gives me a great sense of pride. Working at Tremont this summer has boosted my confidence in my ability to teach others. I realized that even if I don't know everything about a subject, others are still interested in learning what I am willing to teach.

Not only did I get the joy of teaching others about this wonderful place all summer, but I was also constantly learning. I learned an incredible amount of information this summer, both from kids and fellow staff members. Thank you to everyone who made this such an awesome summer! I enjoyed all of it and working with every individual was such a pleasure!

—Amanda Heinrich

From the Science Room

New and old faces around the science room

by Michelle Prysby, Citizen Science Director

Kudos to our Volunteer Research Interns!

As another successful summer of citizen science at Tremont draws to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our many volunteers who have helped to keep our research projects going. These volunteers have woken up before dawn, spent hours swimming in chilly rivers, baked in the hot sunshine in Cades Cove, and recorded data in the pouring rain. Lest volunteering sound like punishment rather than fun, note that these same volunteers endured these trials in order to band birds, hunt for hellbenders, search for monarch butterflies, and catch salamanders in the streams. Holding a live bird in the hand is a pretty good reward for getting up early in the morning, and it's hard to beat the thrill of finding a hellbender under a river rock. Students, teachers, and parents from our local communities experience these wonders through our Volunteer Research Intern program.

Some of our particularly dedicated volunteers this summer included Audrey and Lindsay Little-Crawford, who have assisted with our bird banding research for three summers and Team Pigpen (Gar, Keane, and Richard Secrist, Taylor and Jama Rinehart, and Sam Howell), who have monitored salamander populations at the Pigpen Branch for three years, even in the dead of winter! Marsha Segal and Gerry, teachers from St. Mary's School of Oak Ridge, led a team of intrepid student volunteers in weekly visits to Tremont, collecting data and samples for projects on beetles, salamanders, fungi, dragonflies, and other species. Heritage Middle School science teacher Patsy Russell is leading students from the Builders Club in monthly salamander monitoring. Bobbi Beckman donned a wetsuit and jumped in the Little River in search of hellbenders. All of these folks help keep our citizen science projects going and help us meet our mission of connecting people and nature, and we thank them for their participation.

We are always on the lookout for local students and teachers interested in helping

us with our citizen science efforts. Ecology clubs, service clubs, and other organized groups work especially well, but individuals are welcome as well. Please contact us to find out more about current opportunities.

Science Updates from Gar

Gar Secrist has been with Tremont a long time, first as a school group participant, then as a summer camper, then as a Volunteer Research Intern, and most lately as a Summer Research Assistant. As our only Summer Research Assistant this year, Gar did a fabulous job managing projects, collecting data, leading volunteers, and even teaching summer campers. Part of his role this summer was to produce a weekly report on science activities to share with Tremont staff, board, and friends. Here are a few excerpts from those reports to give you an insider's view on some of our research findings:

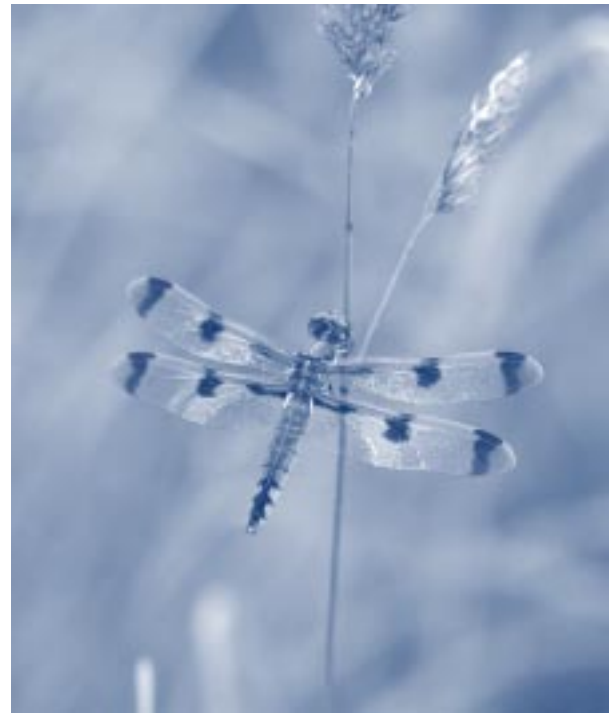
"One of Tremont's more recent projects has been a survey of Odonates (dragonflies and damselflies) for the ATBI. This group of insects had not really been studied thoroughly in the park until last year, when a group of researchers began to identify and report Odonate sightings.

Throughout the summer, Tremont has been working to aid in this effort with Odonate searches at Cades Cove with volunteer and participant groups, including St. Mary's School volunteers, Field Ecology Adventure campers, and Naturalist Week participants. The inventory by St. Mary's School was particularly successful. Seventeen species were identified that day!

We capture Odonates with aerial nets, identify them, and record their location via GPS units. A large variety of species have been identified at sites including Shields Pond, Methodist Church Pond, and

Gourley Pond. We've also been recording any Odonate sightings at Tremont, and have searched around campus and on Anthony Creek Trail. In addition, we have collected a number of specimens for Tremont and soaked them in acetone to preserve them. The 29 total species found by these educational groups includes such species as the Sweetflag Spreadwing, the Fragile Forktail, and the Great Blue Skimmer.

Throughout the summer, Tremont science staff, science campers, and volunteers have been on the lookout for beetles in two particular habitats: shallow, standing water and animal scat. We've taken beetle-collecting equipment with us on various hikes during our programs. Aquatic beetles are collected by disturbing puddle or pond water, waiting for the water to clear, and using aquarium nets to catch any bee-



This painted skimmer, captured during Field Ecology Adventure, set a new species record for Purchase Knob.

Les McClason

flies that appear. Dung beetles are collected with aspirators. The beetles are stored in vials of alcohol with a slip of paper noting the date, location, and collectors. This summer, we have collected a total of about 34 aquatic beetles and 28 dung beetles! We are now preparing to send our collection to Dr. Charlie Staines for identification. This project will provide valuable data on beetle species distribution in the park for the ATBI."

—Excerpts from *Friday Science Reports* by Gar Secrist, Summer Research Assistants

A Bird in the Hand...

Bird-banding at Tremont—season 6

by Charlie Muise

We have nearly completed the sixth season of bird banding at Tremont. Our station operates under a protocol called Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship, or MAPS. We catch, mark, and release birds during the breeding season to get information about how long birds live, how many young they are producing, and how often they return to the same nesting area. We use 10 nets to catch the birds for six hours per day, and eight days per season for a total of 480 (net hours).

Banding during the breeding season means catching fewer birds, and also fewer species, than during migration because there are no birds “passing through” and the only birds likely to be caught are those nesting in the immediate vicinity. Warblers tend to have territories of between .5 and .75 acres, so we usually only catch the very local birds. This is offset by the fact that we “get to know” birds better. Whereas most birds banded in migration are never recorded again, MAPS stations get many recaptured birds. This means we can better learn what goes on in a bird’s life. This

year we captured 12 birds that were already banded. One of these birds is at least five years old and had been captured at least twice before.

As usual, the most-caught species was Louisiana Waterthrush. Of the 56 captures we recorded, 32 were of this cryptically-colored warbler. In fact, we have not yet been able to learn of a station that captures more of this species anywhere on earth. This is not surprising because waterthrushes, which only nest in the southeastern US, tend to stay close to the ground, while some common bird species tend to stay high in the trees, so we can’t catch them. It also makes sense because waterthrushes nest in riparian areas, and our nets are centered on the Middle Prong of the Little River.

This was a great nesting year for waterthrushes. Of the 32 captures, 21 were birds that hatched this year. We even had a newly-fledged bird as early as May 23, the very first banding day of the year.

We added another species to the station list when we caught the first ever Eastern Screech-Owl. Unfortunately, we didn’t

have bands big enough to fit it, but we did take many pictures.

As usual, teenagers helped make the station go. Lindsay Crawford (a volunteer) and Gar Secrist (summer science intern) each removed more birds from the nets than I did. They also helped by taking notes when I processed birds, interpreting the process to others, and setting up equipment. Gar also processed several birds this year.

For the third year in a row we had many excellent pictures taken by Lindsay’s mom, Audrey Little-Crawford. Audrey also helped on net runs and was the person who found and extracted the owl.

While the science is important, education is the main goal of our station. In addition to the several regular volunteers and Gar, many people visited the station to learn about birds and bird research. This included a home school group from Sevier County, a high school group from Indiana, a high school group from Knoxville, Highlands Biological Station, and numerous summer campers. Spreading the word a little further, Gar and Charlie were even interviewed for a short spot on WBIR TV.

If you would like to visit our banding station or know of a young person who would like to help with this or one of our other Citizen Science projects, contact us at: Charlie@gsmiit.org or 865-448-6709, ext 21.

Aware Necessity

Experience is the way to understanding

Many people love and enjoy nature; however, there are still many who have not developed the appreciation for the environment that our country once had. I recently did some soul searching and developed a motto, which I find to be a good representation of how everything is connected. “Awareness leads to understanding, understanding leads to appreciation, and appreciation leads to respect. Once someone truly respects something, they will love it and

care for it.” After adopting this motto, I realized the importance of environmental education—what I find to be our main goal here at Tremont. We take our participants out there and show them the Smoky Mountains. Reading about it in a book is wonderful, but actually experiencing it and becoming aware is the only way to understand. You have to start at the beginning. I feel Tremont



does a wonderful job of making all of its visitors more aware.

This summer here at Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont has only emphasized these ideals further. As an environmental education summer intern, I have seen firsthand how much the programs at Tremont bring that awareness to children and adults who visit. Tremont and its staff have taken campers who were unsure about wilderness and nature and made them comfortable in the outdoors. Tremont intrigues adults with an

interest in the wilderness and takes them to visit that area they already love. As I processed the vast amounts of information that I have learned, I realized Tremont helps in all aspects—Awareness, Appreciation, Understanding, and Respect.

With similar values and goals, I feel as if I could not have chosen a more perfect internship than this one here at Tremont. The new people I met and the information I learned will never be forgotten. I have connected with nature, and that is one bond that will not be broken.

—Mary Henderson



Looking Ahead

Classroom getaways

The following are some of the exciting upcoming opportunities in our classroom in Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Why not treat yourself and plan for a getaway with us by signing up now!

Check for further details available on our website at www.gsmnit.org

School Groups are signing up

Our 2005-2006 school year calendar is full during peak seasons but we still have a number of openings available during non-peak times in the winter months, some weekends, and early and late summer. Contact us for details or more information on getting your school involved. Registration for the 2006-2007 school year will begin in January.

Use Tremont for meetings, youth events, etc. during the off season

If a retreat to the Smokies for a winter get-away is something that your organization, youth group, business or agency could benefit from, please contact us for details about rates and available times. Groups with an emphasis on spending part of their time learning about the Smokies will be given preference but space for those who are interested in a relaxed setting that the park can provide for your meetings is available on a limited basis. Contact our registrar at 865-448-6709 or mail@gsmnit.org

Family Adventure Weekend

September 23 - 25

Spend a weekend with the family and the Tremont staff exploring Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This weekend is chocked full of hikes, crafts, games, waterfalls, beautiful views, campfires and plenty of time to enjoy being with the ones you love. We will provide discovery and adventure AND we do all the cooking! It doesn't get much better than this! Program lasts from Friday supper through Sunday lunch. Cost: \$300 for family of four ages 6 and up (\$70 for each additional person); includes all meals, lodging, materials, and instruction. For more info: www.gsmnit.org/Programs/familyweekend.html

Teacher Escape Weekend

October 7 - 9

Teachers who bring school groups to Tremont are invited to join together to share knowledge and experiences of making the most of your school's visit. Learn ways to prepare your students, help them get the most from their experience, and bring the lessons back to the classroom. All of this while enjoying a beautiful fall weekend in the Smokies. Lasts from Friday supper to Sunday lunch. Cost: FREE with your school's scheduled attendance. (A refundable deposit required.)

Fall Naturalist Weekend

October 28 - 30

Spend a weekend studying the natural and cultural history of the park. Learn about the natural world through the study of black bears, fungi, trees, or a smidgen of everything. These workshops give you the opportunity to learn from people that love the Smokies and natural history. Many instructors are scientists and researchers with expertise in their fields of study. Your days will be filled with learning and your evenings with great lectures and entertainment. Program lasts from Friday supper to Sunday lunch. Cost: \$200/participant (includes meals, lodging and instruction.) One hour of graduate credit is available for an additional fee.

Women's Fall Backpack

October 28 - 30

As you hike along the ridge of Rich Mountain, you are amazed at the striking color of the leaves and the incredible views of the valley below. You are fascinated by the stories of this mountain and the diversity of life all around. Although the hike has been challenging, you've learned so much about Great Smoky Mountains National Park, not to mention all the great backpacking skills you've picked up. What an unforgettable experience it has been to venture into the backcountry on this "women only" trip. You know soon you'll arrive at camp and after a hearty dinner, you'll enjoy relaxing by the fire with a mug of hot tea, reminiscing the day's adventures with your new friends. Cost: \$215.

Tremont Work Day

November 12

Roll up you sleeves and join us for this annual day to get a backlog of work projects around the facility accomplished. Call and or check our web site for details and to register.

The Arts and the Environment Weekend

February 17-19

"I wouldn't miss this special weekend filled with creative people and opportunities to tap into nature's inspiration and the creativity within myself." —workshop participant

Why not take some time as winter begins to ebb in the Smokies to nurture your own creativity and enjoy this unique opportunity to explore the relationship between arts and the environment. In addition to a host of hands-on sessions led by talented artisans and educators, we will enjoy a performance by the environmental folk group MAGPIE. This award-winning group from Maryland uses songs, stories, and a wide variety of instruments and musical traditions to delight its audience. Husband and wife team Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino have performed together since 1973 and recorded over ten albums. They have collaborated with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, and are master artists with the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning through the Arts. In addition to their performance, they will lead a Saturday workshop for weekend attendees. Other sessions and details will be posted on our website throughout fall and winter. Cost for the full weekend including the Friday night performance at the Palace Theater: \$200.

Other upcoming sessions:

Elderhostel Fall Hike: October 16 - 21

Autumn Brilliance Photography Workshop: October 21 - 24

Fall Adult Backpack: October 21 - 23 FULL

Wilderness First Responder: January 22 - 29

Homeschool Consortium: February 8 - 10

Family Weekend: February 10 - 12

Check our website www.gsmnit.org for a full listing of 2006 programs dates.

Donations

From 5/9/05 to 8/3/05. Thank you!

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1 Mail this form to: Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, 9275 Tremont Road, Townsend, TN 37882

2 Fax this form to: 865-448-9250

3 E-mail us at: mail@gsmiit.org.
(Please give us your name as it is listed on the mailing label.)

4 Call us at: 865-448-6709

Address changes:

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