

Walker Valley

The newsletter of Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont

Spring 2010

REFLECTIONS



CELEBRATING
40 years



Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont
2009 Annual Report



of
CONNECTING
people and nature

www.gsmit.org

It has been especially wintry in the Smokies the past couple of months. We have enjoyed seeing Spruce Flats Falls fully frozen and the rocks in the Middle Prong encircled with ice. Family weekend participants were treated to a fresh snow and closed park roads that allowed them to



experience Walker Valley and the winter magic all by themselves. School groups have enjoyed seeing animal tracks,

snow-topped mountains, and the peace of winter in the Smokies.

Observant naturalists however, have been watching for the first signs of spring. Wood frogs are one of our early harbingers and Jeremy Lloyd saw our first ones on January 24th. Mary Silver spotted our first wildflower to bloom on February 4th, a purple violet. Mickey Larkins and family camp participants caught trailing arbutus blooming on the falls trail on February 13th, even though snow was covering most of the valley. One of our Citizen Science projects involves counting wood frog and spotted salamander egg masses, and this past week a group of our naturalists counted over 100 wood frog egg masses in a gum swamp. (See What is Your Harbinger, pages 8 & 9)

While we encourage people to be engaged with the "moment" in our programs, anticipating and watching for what will be happening next in nature is a great way to sharpen observation skills, be ready for what is upcoming, and develop a deeper sense of place.

The same is true as we look back at 2009 and shift to consider the signs of what is to come. As we celebrated Tremont's 40th and the Smokies' 75th anniversaries, we focused on the many great accomplishments and forward strides in our efforts to connect people and nature. It is amazing to consider the thousands of people who have been touched by Tremont programs over the years and who, as a result, have a greater sense of ownership and appreciation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

As we began 2009, the signs related to the economy were a bit dismal, but in-depth residential environmental education programs at GSMIT still reached 5,776 people. As residential participants are involved in programs of several days or more, our impact is better translated into 21,280 user days and 183,008 program hours. In comparison with the past year, attendance was relatively flat with a slight decrease in school program attendance but a 12% increase in adult programs because of the popularity of our Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification Program. (See other 2009 stats on page 4)

In terms of finances, our staff did an exceptional job of controlling and cutting expenses to allow us to meet our budget and end the year in the black in spite of reductions in support income. Our total income

was \$1,327,065, which was a 3.1% increase from 2008. We broke all records for Tremont store sales in 2009 with a 14% increase over 2008.

Not many non-profits in 2009 were able to say, as we are, that we had good attendance, very good sales, and donations that were still very strong. We view these successes as indicators that Tremont is highly valued by our participants and supporters and not something that they want to see compromised during difficult financial times.

The signs look promising for another exciting year at Tremont. There are a number of trends and opportunities related to children and nature, a renewed focus on our national parks and various green initiatives, that we anticipate will enable us to further the reach of our mission in the upcoming years. On the following pages you will see some of the details of what we accomplished in 2009 as well as what we are planning for the future.

Thanks to all of you who played a part in our successes. We hope you will join us in watching for and experiencing nature's wonders as they reveal themselves in 2010!

Ken Voorhis
GSMIT Executive Director

Comments or suggestions? Let us hear from you!

We'd like to know if you are satisfied with our newsletter, and we are interested in what you would like to read in future issues.

So e-mail your comments to us today at mail@gsmnit.org

Our people, our plans

Our greatest resource is the people that do the work to make all that happens at Tremont possible. We continue to strengthen our team and enhance our abilities through staff development and effective hiring.

Our Program Leadership Team met regularly and implemented strategies to improve our programs and enhance their impact and the effectiveness of our education team.

The Tremont staff is a tremendously talented and dedicated team of professionals, committed to connecting people and nature in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

We also have a wonderfully qualified and committed board of directors that continues to help us develop, shape, and bring about an exciting vision for Tremont's future.

The staff, board, and park staff went through a strategic planning process early in 2009 and key strategies were developed as follows:

1. Maintain a sustainable funding base through the appropriate balance of earned versus support income
2. Better define and develop a mutually beneficial partnership with GSMNP
3. Improve the appeal, functionality and sustainable design of the facilities

Our programs

In 2009, 98 schools from 13 states attended our school programs. We saw a slight increase in five-day programs that is a bit surprising in that many schools have been reducing the length or number of field trips they take. The five-day program allows students to have a much deeper experience with the park.

Summer youth programs provided "deep-impact" learning by bringing back handpicked students who'd come with their schools over the previous year (Science Seekers). Two-dozen girls attended our first ever Girls In Science Camp (funded by Toyota). Our Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification Program, which was designed to provide in-depth training in interpretation and natural history, continues to be successful in its second year. We certified our first two graduates of this program in 2009, after they successfully completed the 105+ required hours of lecture, projects, and fieldwork.

The list of new and remade programs this year is impressive. We created two teacher workshops, a new Girls in Science weeklong summer program,

and first time Naturalist Certification course in Reptiles and Amphibians, not to mention all of the new material and content created for a host of special programs and summer camps. Our two teacher escape weekends highlighted our cooperative teaching model and exposed over 100 teachers to underused course offerings in citizen science and creative expressions.

The infusion of Citizen Science into programming sets us apart from most other organizations in the field of environmental education. It is both scientifically and educationally meaningful. Through these projects, we collect data and expose participants to the world of field science as they become scientists seeking answers to questions in ecology.

In this realm, we continued to monitor projects and provide varied opportunities for participants to take part in authentic field science. We even began several new projects this year, including a ladybug study. These projects are integrated into our programming in such a way that schools, summer campers, and adult participants all get a taste of this fascinating world of inquiry and field science.

Other Programs/Initiatives

Successes and progress of note in other areas included:

- Tremont funded our weeklong Summer Science Teacher Institute this year. We partnered with NIMBioS, National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis, to assist with this program. They also sponsored two teachers (\$1000) for the course.
- Summer Family Camp had the highest enrollment ever with participants joining us from South Dakota, Indiana, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Tennessee.
- For the 9th consecutive summer we hosted three Summer Youth Science Leadership interns through a grant from Alcoa Foundation. In addition, this grant allowed the purchase and installation of a solar array on the Tremont campus to model and teach sustainability to the thousands of students, teachers and families who visit us each year.
- Our solar array went into operation on January 12th. Over the year the panels have generated 1,916 kilowatt hours of electricity and reduced our carbon footprint by over 32,581. In 2009 we reduced our energy usage for our administrative building by 13,942 kwh or 33%. That equated to annual savings of

\$1,520 from the previous year.

The panels are a great educational tool for both Tremont visitors and the public who are drawn to ask questions about the panels.

We also hosted a public workshop on solar energy in June involving the following partners: TVA, Sevier County Electric, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and Lile's Acres Organic farm.

- An Endowment Fundraising Dinner was held in May at the Foothills Milling Company with 53 people in attendance. This event was planned and developed by the Development Committee of Tremont's Board and earned \$76,500 for the endowment through tickets and live auction.
- Our second annual Great Smoky Mountains National Park Scavenger Hunt was a great success. Twenty teams with 105 individuals registered, and all those involved had a lot of fun experiencing and learning about the park.
- 21 local Walmart managers volunteered time and effort during April to enhance our recycling program area and to learn about Tremont programs, operations, and needs. We hope to develop with this team a long-term partnership with a common purpose toward promoting sustainability.
- The 40th anniversary Tremont Homecoming was a success in spite of rainy weather. This was our third annual homecoming, and we hosted 139 people for the event and raised \$19,170 for annual funds and \$1,375 for scholarships. Program staff manned activity stations during the homecoming, and we heard stories about Tremont impacting lives from a number of past participants and leaders. About 30 former staff also attended a reunion and campfire on Saturday night.
- Tremont took on social media and our Facebook page was fairly active throughout the year, taking our number of "fans" to over 600 before the year was over.
- The Second Century Commission issued a report with recommendations for what our national park should focus on in the future. A meeting to present the report and discuss strategies for moving the recommendations forward was held at the Howard Baker Center at UT. Executive Director Ken Voorhis participated in the meeting as did the park superintendent and representatives from

continued on page 4

ATTENDANCE		FINANCIAL	
Total residential participants	5,776	Earned income	85%
Youth programs	4,670	Program fees	\$1,034,203
• Students	3,945	Net sales	\$65,941
• Teachers/adult leaders	725	Increase in investments	\$17,441
Adult programs	1,106	TOTAL earned income	\$1,117,585
Program user days	21,280	Support income	15%
Program user hours	176,624	Program fees subsidized	\$40,280
Citizen Science participants	451	Other support income	\$149,200
Outreach	871	TOTAL support income	\$189,480
Park visitors (in visitor center)	11,067	Total income (operating)	\$1,307,065
Total impacts	18,165	Expenses (operating)	\$1,284,240
Number of groups	127	Capital expense	\$23,763
• Youth 3-day	64	Endowment (current value)	\$1,084,340
• Youth 5-day	34	Financial aid	
• Adult	29	• 594 students received \$40,280	

continued from page 3

other park partners. Education and getting children into the parks was a significant emphasis of this report.

- Tremont has been approved to host the 2011 annual summit of the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA).

- We have been involved with a state coalition—Every Child Outdoors (ECO)—to promote involving children in the outdoors. Education Director John DiDiego has been serving on a committee to help develop a state environmental literacy plan, and Ken Voorhis is on the steering committee for a Governor’s children and nature summit.

Our facilities

We continue to seek out ways to make improvements to our campus to enhance our programs and make the Tremont experience the best and safest it can be.

Some of the major projects that we were able to accomplish this year include:

- The National Park Service (NPS) replaced our entrance sign with a sign that matches the look of all park signage. Tremont’s logo and name are included with NPS arrowhead and GSMNP designation.

- The Great Smoky Mountains Association (GSMA) north district trail crew made some

wonderful improvements to the Spruce Flats Falls trail.

- A number of improvements were made to the dormitory including: stripping and waxing of all floors, sealing walls and moldings, new toilet partitions throughout, new mirrors and sink assemblies, new exit lighting and the installation of two UV air purifiers.

- A new HVAC system was installed for both the Science Room and Spruce Fir Room.

Campus redevelopment

The Environmental Assessment for the new facilities has been finalized and is in the final processes for approval. The park asked that Tremont raise \$50,000 for re-design documents to help with the final approval and moving the project to the next phase. Those funds have been secured. Senator Alexander authored and helped move the Interior Appropriations bill through Congress that contains \$1.6 million for infrastructure for this project.

As a result of discussions at our strategic planning retreat, we will develop a working partnership group to find ways to best enhance our relationship.

Our supporters

Support income includes park-designated funds from Friends of the Smokies and the Great Smoky Mountains Association (GSMA), donated

profits from our store from GSMA, donations from many generous individuals and foundations, endowment disbursements, and grants.

We are so appreciative of the many donors who continued to give to Tremont in 2009 in spite of the recession. The 2009 Annual Major Donor campaign led by Dick Ray, former board chair, raised over \$60,600. Our total Annual Fund campaign raised over \$80,000. Grants, in-kind services and donations, as well as numerous sponsorships for events, provided valued support as well.

Our sincere thanks go out to all who supported us this past year. Because of you, children of all ages are being connected with nature in Great Smoky Mountains National Park!

THANK YOU!

...to the many generous individuals, organizations, and companies who helped support Tremont in 2009. Without you, we would not be able to serve the thousands of students and adults each year in this awesome place.

We hope you will continue your support in 2010. You can donate online through our secure store site at www.gsmit.org/donate.html.

Donations

From 1/1/09 to 12/31/09:

\$15,000-\$30,000

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Cornerstone Foundation
Friends of the Smokies
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Donations

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Kade Parker
Robyn Parker
Kendra Pesterfield
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Smoky Mountain Explorers
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West End Middle School
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Jennie Whited
John & Kathy Wilbanks
Joan Worley

Tremont's Artist in Residence

Debora Blind is an artist and art educator from Hamilton, Ohio. Her work reflects an interest in both the fine arts and traditional fine craft processes. Her 23-year teaching career as a visual art instructor has involved all age groups.

For the past two summers she has served as Tremont's Artist in Residence. She enjoys interacting with Tremont staff and campers, and encourages us to experience the visual arts as a bridge connecting various environmental concepts to the aesthetic appreciation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

We look forward to welcoming Debora back again this year. The summer of 2010 promises many new experiences, new works of art being created, and new friends that will become a living part of Walker Valley.

"Healing Pathways" one of Debora's poems was inspired by her visits to the Smokies. See page 11.

Save the date!

Join us for our fourth annual homecoming on Sunday, September 19, 2010!

Proceeds benefit Tremont's scholarship program.



Exploritas*

By Mary Silver, teacher/naturalist

We had hiked in wind and sunshine all day, our trail leading us through thick woods and out onto open ridges. My group members had searched for salamanders, helped each other rock-hop across several streams, and enjoyed a solo hike past a small waterfall. A handful of them had even mastered the technique of whistling in an acorn cap. Now, toward the end of the day, two or three of my hikers were zigzagging ahead to chase after leaves in the October breeze.



This was not a bunch of fourth-graders. Most of the people in my group were retired. Some had grandchildren. All of them, though, were as excited to be out exploring the Smokies as the most wide-eyed elementary school field trippers ever to bounce out of a yellow bus. Not about to leave all the fun of Tremont to the kids, they were in the midst of our Hiking Elderhostel, and loving every minute.

Each year, folks from all across the country gather in Walker Valley for a week in October and another in April. It is prime hiking time in the Smokies, and by the end of the trip, they have logged more miles on their boots than many people do in a month. With several options every day, hikers choose to take on iconic climbs like Mt. Le Conte, walk seldom-used trails in remote areas of the park, or meander through the woods at a wildflower enthusiast's pace.

No matter the length or difficulty, common to all the hikes is a spirit of fun and a sense of camaraderie. There's something about sharing the beauty along with the challenges of the trail that brings people together, and real friendships are formed here in the mountains. Two hikers who have become great friends of ours over the years, Herb Coleman and Sandy McHone, have offered to share their perspectives on Tremont's Hiking Elderhostel.

Herb, from Illinois, has been hiking with us nine times, and Sandy, from Texas, has been a part of eight of our Elderhostels. Here's what they have to say about their experiences here.

I plan to go to Tremont until I am so old that all I do is sit in a rocking chair in the pavilion. I simply love everything about the entire experience—the beautiful mountains, the great people who work there, even the unusual accommodations. Before I attended my first Elderhostel, I thought a group of women in one

room would be a disaster, but it reminds me of Girl Scout camp, and I loved Girl Scout camp too!

I've met many interesting people at Tremont, made friends, and have taken friends with me. I have probably fallen more than any other Elderhosteler (nothing broken so far, thank goodness!), had more yellow jacket stings and

probably have laughed more—or at least as much as—anyone else.

I love the programs at night, have the CDs of all the groups, and know all the words to their songs!

Did I say that I LOVE Tremont?
—Sandy McHone

As you can imagine, we are looking forward to seeing these two again in a few weeks, at our first ever Spring Hiking Exploritas! On April 12-17, we will once again partner with *Elderhostel, Inc. to offer a memorable week of hikes throughout the park. The new program name, a combination of the words "explore" and "veritas," reflects

the organization's ongoing commitment to lifelong learning, now without an age requirement.

For Tremont, Exploritas means that folks don't have to wait until they're 55 to spend a spring or fall week hiking with us. To sign up for either season, go to www.exploritas.org, and look for us in the Tennessee section.

I enjoy coming to the Smokies both in the spring with all the wildflowers and the fall with all the color in the trees as they prepare for winter. I am good friends with a number of the staff members and another main reason that I enjoy my trips to the Smokies is to see them.

I really do not have a favorite trail. Probably one of the most memorable trips was the fall of 2006 when the hurricane-force winds came through the park one night causing roads and trails to be closed by fallen trees, including the road around Cades Cove.

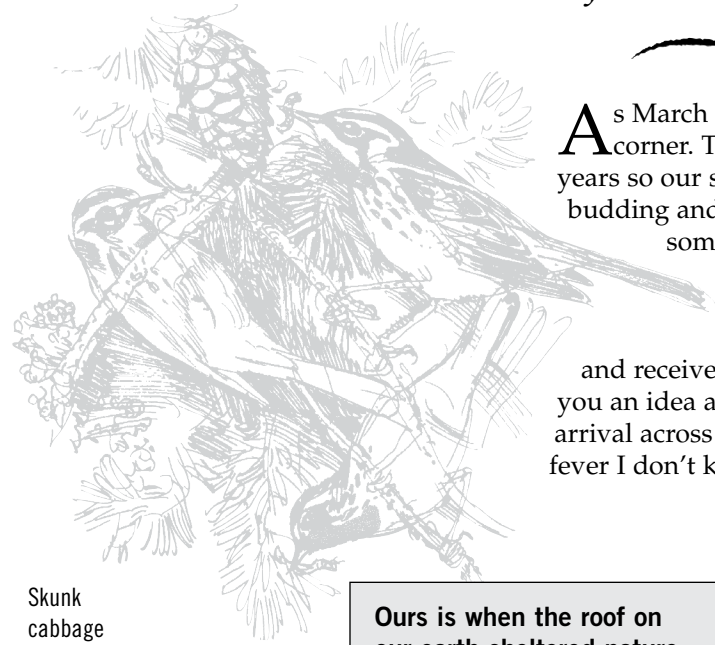
Seeing the Little Greenbrier School is always interesting as I attended a small one room rural school. I am always surprised at how the descendents of the early settlers come back to Walker Valley each year to decorate the cemetery within the park. I'm glad that Jeremy has brought back to life the history of Walker Valley in his book A Home in Walker Valley which will preserve for the future the stories of the early days of Tremont.

A number of people around home inquire each year if I am going back again as some of them have seen the pictures that I have taken on my trips. I do plan to keep coming back to Tremont as long as I am able, not only for the beauty of the area but also to see my friends there.

—Herb Coleman

What is your Harbinger?

By Ken Voorhis, executive director



As March approaches so do nature's signs that spring is just around the corner. Tremont has been collecting "phenology" data for nearly 25 years so our staff is well tuned into the arrival of the first warbler, the budding and blossoming of trees and flowers, insects on the wing and some of the other more subtle observations of the changing seasons like a warm winter rain. I e-mailed colleagues with the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) asking them, "What is your harbinger?" and received the excited responses here that give you an idea about how people anticipate spring's arrival across the U.S. If this doesn't give you spring fever I don't know what will! Enjoy.

Skunk cabbage "blooming" in the fen is our first indication! But the migration of the spotted salamanders on the first warm rainy night is what really does it for me! I once experienced this migration in the thousands!

Deb Oexmann, Brukner Nature Center, Troy, Ohio

Ours is when the roof on our earth sheltered nature center begins leaking. Though our sap buckets are not out yet, the buckets to catch the snow melt inside were placed in the building yesterday!

Cynthia R. Mueller, Gordon Bubolz Nature Preserve, Appleton, Wisconsin

It is not one thing... it is the sudden but subtle change in the outdoors as a whole. The air is crisp yet heavier, the sun cast shadows where none were, the slight smell of new things emerging, the evenings draw longer, the birds are curious, and we... we tend to be drawn to it all.

Martin Hagne, Valley Nature Center, Weslaco, Texas

Wood frogs croaking in the pond, Woodcock peenting over the meadow, Red-winged blackbird singing from the marsh... that wonderful spring smell of thawing earth... hmmm!... and... the sign that spring is REALLY here... that first night you can leave the window wide open and wake up to the sounds of the morning. Can't wait!

Iain MacLeod, Squam Lakes Natural Science Center, Holderness, New Hampshire

For us, it is the first calls of sandhill cranes!

Keanna Leonard, Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary, Gibbon, Nebraska

For me, it's the woodcocks doing their mating spiral in our fields in late February.

Connie O'Connor, Cincinnati Nature Center, Cincinnati, Ohio

Here in the far reaches of northeastern MN, spring is coming when we hear the ice booming and cracking on the lakes, the snow fleas are out (really, they do exist), my long underwear comes off, robins appear (although one poor schmuck showed up in January... I think he's still frozen to the spruce tree out front). Spring peepers, mourning cloak butterflies, maple syrup time, roaring waterfalls... But the surest signs of spring are when the college

In Central Texas, the florets of Blue Bonnets, American Robins, and a Cedar Elm on my property that is always the first to leaf out. BTW, we had snow on Tuesday! Quite unusual for us... everyone was acting like a kid anticipating it.

Berth Banks, McKinney Roughs Nature Park, Cedar Creek, Texas

students in Duluth start wearing shorts and t-shirts, and you see bikinis on the ski slopes. When does this happen? When the thermometer hits a whopping 45 degrees! (it's -18 here today).

Kim Skyelander, Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, Finland, Minnesota

When the rain finally started back in November, we literally danced in the street we were so excited. Everything sprung to life with green within a day! A few weeks later I had a strange moment when I realized that it was not actually spring yet and that the rains were only starting. We'll be drying out again soon, but the flowers are really going full force. Yellow Acacias, pink plums and cherries, white pears... They're EVERYWHERE. And the hummingbirds aren't draining our feeder nearly as quickly as they were a couple of weeks ago...

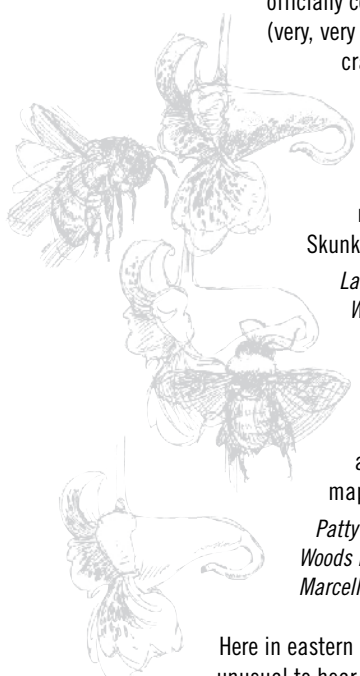
James Frank, East Bay Regional Park District, Oakland, California

First of all, "SPRING" is very unpredictable at 8,250 feet! But, sometime in April, the Pasque flowers will poke their beautiful crocus heads out of the snow dressed in gorgeous lavender. An occasional Mourning Cloak butterfly will float past and EVERY YEAR on April 30, the Broad Tail Hummingbird returns! Oh my, we do look forward to that around here. We have 6 degrees, gusty winds, thick ice and fresh snow on the ground today!

Jill Dreves, Wild Bear Center for Nature Discovery, Nederland, Colorado

Here in SE Wisconsin, Cardinals have been singing, we are now into our night freeze/day thaw cycle (making trails treacherous), and I am waiting for the Redwings to suddenly appear (as they always seem to do) on March 2nd. But I will know spring has officially come when swirling flocks (very, very high up) of calling sandhill cranes return, welcoming each other back. Then I will go out and (as I do every year) crouch down and ceremoniously stick my nose into a new-blooming Skunk Cabbage, and inhale Spring!

Larry Kascht, Retzer Nature Center, Waukesha, Wisconsin



It's the peenting of the timberdoodles we hear when we are out tending the maple sap evaporator.

Patty Weisse, Baltimore Woods Nature Center, Marcellus, New York

Here in eastern Missouri it is not unusual to hear spring peepers while conducting our maple syrup program, which is just wrapping up. This year, we've heard ONE peeper so far...bring on the spring!

Lydia Toth, Nature Reserve, Gray Summit, Missouri

The late February/early March arrival en masse of red-winged blackbirds. There is a huge old white oak across from the parking lot at work and one morning, all of a sudden, it is positively dripping with them. And the wonderful smell of defrosting earth—LOVE that smell.

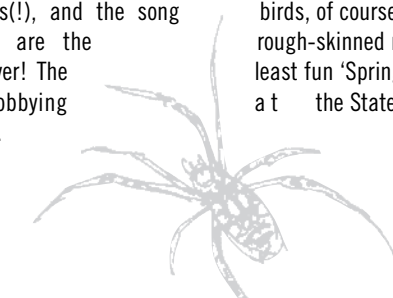
Susan Gallagher, Carbon County EEC, Summit Hill, Pennsylvania

Harbingers of spring in Montana... icicles building up and dripping away from snow covered rocky outcrops (and my gutters), deer weaning themselves off our landscaping and heading back to the mountains, rough legged hawks leaving their Montana winter range and migrating north for the long days of summer, dog-tooth lily's peaking out of the semi-snow covered marshes in the high country. Did I mention this is between April and June? We have a while. In the meantime, break out the Yak-Tracks for the treacherous foothill trails.

Bobbi J. Geise, Learning By Nature, Bozeman, Montana

We have the Indian Plum budding out, the occasional sun breaks(!), and the song most fun this year are the are popping out all over! The is the intense lobbying legislature for funding.

Naomi Maasberg, Stillwaters Environmental Center, Kingston, Washington



red-legged frog chorus, birds, of course. But the rough-skinned newts that least fun 'Spring' activity at the State

It is the time of year that the elk begin to follow the melting snow line to higher ground and Mountain Bluebirds begin to arrive. Probably the surest sign of spring, though, is some big heavy (often wet) snowfalls in March and April and mud season when we often have to close some trails in our system so that they do not get totally trashed. We don't take the plow off our truck here until Memorial Day!

Tim Sandsmark, Lookout Mountain Nature Center and Preserve, Golden, Colorado

Here on the muddy eastern end of Long Island, NY, it's a tie between spring peepers and seeing American robins on the ground (not in the trees where they've been all winter). No peepers yet, but there is a flock of robins on the Visitor Center lawn as I type!

Cindy Belt, The Nature Conservancy-Mashomack Preserve, Shelter Island, New York

We are in a deep canyon in Northern Utah. The sun doesn't quite reach our nature center from November on. Last week it was high enough in the sky to hit our building again. I shrieked with joy. Sometimes we do a little sun appreciation dance.

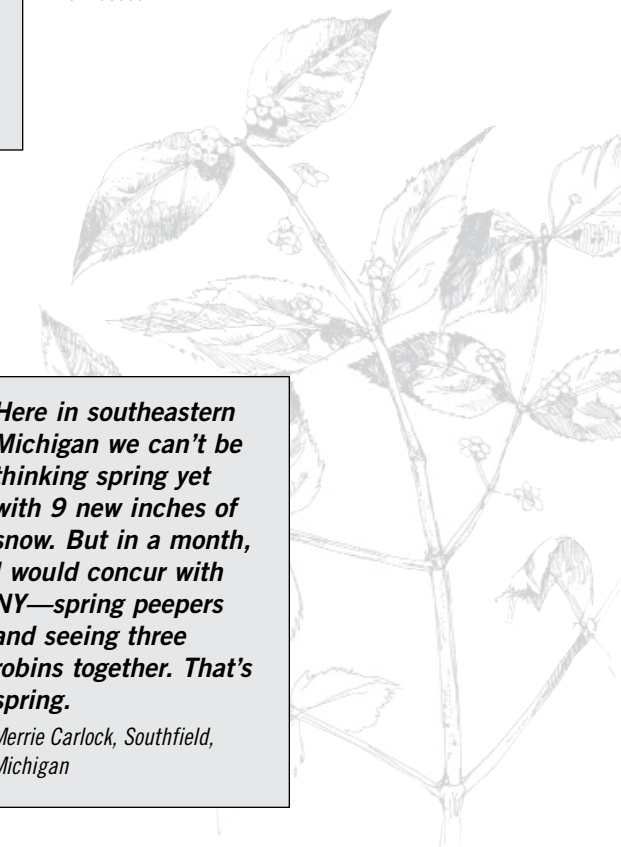
Holly Strand, Stokes Nature Center, Logan, Utah

Here in Middle Tennessee, where no one ventures outside if the temperature is below 40 degrees, our harbinger is the return of the children!

Nancy Garden, Owl's Hill Nature Sanctuary, Nashville, Tennessee

Here in southeastern Michigan we can't be thinking spring yet with 9 new inches of snow. But in a month, I would concur with NY—spring peepers and seeing three robins together. That's spring.

Merrie Carlock, Southfield, Michigan



Wood Frogs

Tyson Weppridge, teacher/naturalist

The heavy winter rains brought excitement to many of the park's low-lying swamps. Wood frogs, after thawing out from our cold weather, have journeyed to ephemeral wetlands for their annual bout of explosive breeding.

Wood frogs, ranging from deciduous forests in the Southeast all the way to Alaska, have adapted to survive frigid winters. In shallow burrows under the leaf litter, they wait out the cold as their bodies freeze.

Wood frogs' heartbeat and breathing will stop as more than half of the water in their body turns to ice.

As temperatures rise in late winter, they thaw slowly and recover bodily functions. First the heartbeat returns after a few hours, even though there may still be ice inside the frog. Basic muscle movement is possible within about twelve hours. Finally, mating behavior is rekindled after a couple of warm days.

Most will travel back to the pond where they were hatched, but only if there is enough rain to fill the sinkholes, depressions, and roadside ditches. As suddenly as an explosion, an entire pond will fill with mating frogs. Within a week, most of the breeding will be finished for the year and the pond's underwater debris will be covered in eggs.

Males arrive at the ponds first, float on the surface, and call for females. If a pair successfully forms, the male holds on firmly in amplexus as the larger female swims underwater to lay a mass of a couple thousand eggs to be externally fertilized. Other females will deposit their egg masses on top of existing eggs to create enormous rafts of eggs containing the overlapping clumps from many different mothers. The frogs will leave the pond after mating, abandoning eggs to develop without parental care.

Temporary ponds will quickly dry in warm weather without sufficient rain, so breeding in winter gives the tadpoles ample time to develop into frogs before the ponds disappear.

The threat of cannibalism also keeps wood frogs punctual. Hungry tadpoles will eat eggs and smaller tadpoles of their own species. If eggs are laid at the same time, developing tadpoles will be similarly sized and unable to eat each other. Wood frogs benefit from breeding early, as latecomers will produce little more than tadpole appetizers. The egg rafts provide extra protection to the developing tadpoles at the center of the massive clumps, as they are insulated from temperature drops and less likely to be eaten by predators. Even the eggs on the edge of a raft have an incentive to join, enjoying a slight temperature elevation compared to clumps alone in the pond.

Naturalists at Tremont have been monitoring wetland sites in the national park since 2007, helping with ongoing amphibian population research. From the time eggs are laid until hatching time, we count and measure the size of egg masses of wood frogs and spotted salamanders, another amphibian that breeds in ephemeral ponds. The number of eggs in these ponds can give researchers an idea of population trends of the two amphibians.

As a hotbed for amphibian diversity, it is important that Great Smoky Mountains National Park monitor populations so that declines can be recognized quickly in order to effectively manage threats to these unique organisms.

If you come to visit in late winter after a rainstorm, inspect the roadside ditches along Tremont Road. You may spot rafts of amphibian eggs or newly developed wood frogs hopping away later in spring.



The New Walker Valley Weather Station

By Tesha Omeis, teacher/naturalist

Behold! At Tremont there lurk many new changes. Some are hard to spot at first glance, requiring a double take to piece together. Others pop out like a stuffed animal in a little hemlock tree.

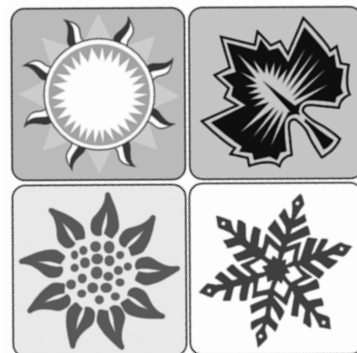
When you drive across the bridge, pause a moment to look to your left. In place of the small white box that has held the key for Walker Valley weather prediction is a large, greatly improved model.

Instruments inside include a thermometer, barometer and relative humidity gauge. There are cloud guides and a Beaufort Wind Scale for gathering information about the current state of the weather.

Posted with every instrument or step in the process, one can see graphs that give perspective on past weather patterns and data gathered.

The future goal is to post the collected data online, making it available for all to see. Incoming schools could check the weather trends approaching their trip and better prepare for the local conditions. So, everyone wins!

Make sure to "oooh" and "ahhh" as you check out the new weather station on your next trip to Tremont!



Healing Pathways

By Debora A. Blind

Upward trail, leading on
Toward sights, sounds, colors
unknown.

Tiny forms with delicate arms-
Reaching, growing, embracing
air.

Freshness sweet, light so green-
Swirling around dark secrets
deep.

Rocks for stepping on watery
seeps

With chorus trilling in four-part
harmonies.

Hidden home-place beckons with
questions asked.

Stones in plumb, side squared,
time tumbled.

Risking answers to:

"Where is home..."

Where is there rest for
one's sacred soul?"

Thoughts tumble down, thrown
out, leading on

To solace sought among trees
and hills.

Back downward now, descending
beside

Skittering spider legs so fragile
and thin.

Leaf litter slithers with soft flow
of light.

Follow more reluctant, as paths
shorten and sigh.

Stepping areas widen, brighten,
come to an end.

Double solid yellow lines emerge,
leading

Back to necessary life:

Time spent breathing soil,
water, and leaves;

Time spent looking at sounds
and tasting forms;

Time spent absorbing the
rhythm of the earth;

...Has now restored balance to
mercenary waves

Pulling along double solid yellow
lines.

Summer Camp—Get Outside!

By Jeremy Lloyd, summer camp director

There is no better time for kids to turn off the TV, put down the video game and get immersed in the "real" world and no better way than by getting outside and going to summer camp! Sign your child up now for a new adventure at summer camp in the Great Smoky Mountains!

Don't have children? Perhaps you can think of a deserving neighbor, relative, or church member in your life who would love the gift of going to summer camp!

Discovery Camp is one of our longest-running programs for children ages 9-12. Together we explore nature, learn about plants and birds, frogs and snakes. We swim in the river every day, take hiking adventures into the best wilderness, spend a night camping out in the woods, and much more!

Wilderness Adventure Trek is a short backcountry trip for teenagers who may never have backpacked before and want to test the waters. This is a favorite for many campers, who return year after year before "graduating" to Teen High Adventure.

Backcountry Ecological Expedition—This unique offering for teenagers involves backpacking or canoeing into the backcountry to set-up field experiments in support of the All-Taxa Biodiversity Inventory, in which the park is attempting to document all of the 100,000 species found in the Smokies.

Girls In Science—Rising 8th grade girls will find this camp an experience like no other. Join a group of other intrepid girls, female staff, and researchers for the scientific adventure of a lifetime.

Teen High Adventure, another trek for teenagers, is 11 days in length with a 7-day backpack trip in the middle. A ropes course and whitewater rafting trip bookend this awesome experience. This is our premiere backpacking offering, and it is designed to give each participant a rewarding experience growing in the areas of backcountry skills, nature appreciation, and personal development.

Field Ecology Adventure gives teenagers the opportunity to work with and as real scientists. Past campers have conducted studies of salamanders, insects, birds, and plants. Climb a mountain and ford a river while doing real science. No other camp quite like this one exists anywhere else.

Smoky Mountain Naturalist Expeditions gives kids ages 11-13 the opportunity to immerse themselves for ten days studying amphibians, black bears, forest ecology, or primitive skills. This is deep immersion, in contrast with the windshield experience of the average park visitor. Expedition naturalists will get to explore areas all over the park, interact with professional land and wildlife managers, and gaze into the glowing embers of an evening campfire after an afternoon spent swimming in the Middle Prong.

If you want to see what a week at one of Tremont's summertime youth programs looks like, samples of weekly activities can be viewed at the Tremont website at www.gsmnit.org/kt. These programs fill quickly, so sign your child up early to avoid being put on a waiting list.

We look forward to meeting you and spending the summer with your child!

For ages 9-12:

Discovery Camp

June 7-12

June 21-26

Cost: \$478

For rising 8th grade girls:

Girls In Science

June 21-26

Cost: \$50 deposit.

For ages 11-13:

Smoky Mountains

Naturalist Expedition

July 12-22

Cost: \$962

For ages 13-17:

Backcountry

Ecological Expedition

June 7-12

Cost: \$504

Wilderness

Adventure Trek

June 7-12

June 21-26

Cost: \$504

Teen High

Adventure

July 12-22

Cost: \$962

Field Ecology

Adventure

July 12-22

Cost: \$962

Fun In The Smokies... Only For Teachers!

By Jen Martin,
school program coordinator

Every January and October, Tremont offers a teacher-training workshop called Teacher Escape Weekend. This workshop is designed for teachers interested in bringing their school groups to Tremont, as well as for veteran teachers who already bring groups to Tremont. It is a time to meet other teachers, share ideas, and learn more about Tremont's programs!

Fifty teachers representing four states attended this past January's workshop. Teachers made clinometers and used them to measure heights of buildings and trees. Our Executive Director, Ken

Voorhis, took teachers on

a winter tree-identification program, showing folks how to use leaf scars and buds to identify trees—without leaves!

Citizen science

is a unique program, and one that is very important to Tremont.

Students participating in these projects gather data that is used by Tremont staff and park researchers to study long-term effects on species. Teachers were introduced to many projects that can be done at school, getting their students involved in learning more about their own natural world.

Teachers have the power to change lives and inspire. We hope that offering opportunities for teachers to learn more about the Smokies will help inspire them to share that knowledge with their students.



Gardening!

By Tesha Omeis, teacher/naturalist

As the frost recedes from Walker Valley and the days continue to lengthen, a small plot of land will give life to a new collection of autotrophs. This spring a number of natives and local medicinal plants will be raised in a small garden beside the activity center at Tremont.

On the natives side, one will find Beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), Violet (*Viola spp.*), Coneflower (*Echinacea angustifolia*), Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), Spiderwort/Dayflower (*Tradescantia virginiana*), and Toothwort (*Cardamine diphylla*).

Plants that were often propagated and grown for their healing qualities include Peppermint (*Mentha pepperita*), Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*), Sage (*Salvia officinalis*), Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*), Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*), and Lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*).

The garden at Tremont will be used in several different classes as a place for senses to explore. Students will make observations in the same ways that allowed our ancestors to determine the potential food source of a plant.

Questions such as the following will assist in their decisions: How does the plant smell? Is the scent attractive or repulsive? Are there animals or insects that are drawn to it? What might that information say? When you touch the leaves and stem does it cause you to draw back in pain?

What could these observations teach you about the edibility of these

plants? If all signs are positive, then perhaps it is time to taste test a small part of the plant! How does it taste? How might taste provide clues of its own? Through experience and observations, the students will draw conclusions about the natural environment around them.

But, this type of experiential learning from a garden is not limited to Tremont! A small garden at school can reap many benefits from the process.

When planning, think about what you want to receive from the garden. Should the focus be vegetables or herbs that

can be eaten; plants that were used by native people for medicinal reasons or for dyeing? Students can diagram the amount of area needed for the selected plants on graph paper. Have the class take ownership! Students can vote on the best design. When the plants flower, observe what pollinators come and under what conditions. Do bees visit in cloudy weather? Does rain deter visitors?

Consider keeping track of crop yields in line graph format. Use the produce! Prepare cultural dishes for taste testing. Create dye from the plants and use to color hard-boiled eggs in spring or tie-dye shirts.

Allow the creative juices to flow and include the garden in as many ways or classes as possible. You may be surprised! One day a family may bump into you on their way to see their son's new pride and joy project!



One Foot in the Classroom

By John DiDiego, education director

When we think of our impact on students, we often think about how meaningful a multi-night trip can be away from home, living in a national park, learning about and experiencing our connection to nature.

But when we consider that the school year has another 170 days, suddenly the experience seems like a drop in the school-year bucket. How can we bring the power of the Tremont experience to bear on the rest of the school year?

Enter our dedicated teacher partners. We rely on these teachers to help shape the experience at Tremont, and we count on them to bring the excitement and tingle of that experience back to their classrooms, schoolyards and communities.

So many environmental education centers provide a package, a service for schools. We like to think we invite teachers and their classes to partner with us, with the mutual goal of fostering curious learners, responsible team players, and good stewards of resources.

Over the years, we have asked for teachers' help and advice with countless projects, lessons, and programs. Through their generous assistance, we have been able to make our programs stronger and stronger.

This year, we are taking that communication to the next level, and initiating a Teacher Advisory Group. This new group will consist of teachers who will help us refine our programs and ensure that we continue to provide cutting edge environmental education.

With your help, we can keep one foot and one ear in the classroom.

If you are interested in being a part of this group, or just hearing more about it, send an email to john@gsmitt.org.



The Tremont Two-Step: An Interview with Bob Grimac

By Adam Leiterman, teacher/naturalist

Put your dancing shoes on, because we are about to do the two-step with Bob Grimac. Bob is one of Tremont's popular evening presenters, who also happens to be a great dancer, educator, and peace activist.

Q: Bob, thanks for taking the time to answer a few questions for our upcoming newsletter. I have two fun questions for you. If you were a plant, what kind would you be? If you had a super power, what would it be?

A: If I were a plant, I would like to be a live oak, one of my favorite trees. I like the fact that they are designed to withstand storms, winds, and floods. I like the fact that they provide food and shelter to man and animal. I like the fact that,

with their low spreading branches and wide stance they are a gathering place for play, discussion, and even dance under their canopies. And, they often live close to the beach!

I wish I had the super power to create peace and harmony in all the lands. I wish I had the super power to feed the hungry people of the world, especially in Haiti right now.

Q: When you were growing up, what did you see yourself doing? What are some of your other passions other than folk dancing and the environment?

A: Growing up, I wanted to be a writer, and have indeed worked as a reporter, then editor, of a weekly paper many years ago.

I teach 23 classes of Spanish weekly at two schools, one public, one private. I am also active

in the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church, and assist refugees in the area.

I will present booths on composting at the Knox County Earth Fair and the Oak Ridge Earth Fair.

I work at the Knoxville Zoo's ZooCamp during the summer.

I was named the Knoxville News Sentinel's Environmental Achiever of the Year in 1997.

Q: How did you first hear about Tremont?

A: I think I first came up here in 1976 with the first class I taught in Oak Ridge, then came a couple of other times with Oak Ridge schools. I used to come through here to hike to the waterfall a lot. I have been teaching at Tremont 10 or 12 years now.

Wintry Happenings in Walker Valley

By Christina McCoy, teacher/naturalist

“So what do ya’ll do when there are no groups here or when it is winter?”

Here’s one answer—we have quite a few brave school groups that come to experience the wonders of winter here at Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

A good example is Grace Christian Academy from Knoxville who visited the second week in January. With this group, we had some snowy adventures like...

Explorations (shelter building class) where the students imagine they are settlers moving into the valley and a snowstorm has just hit. With the forest floor layered with snow and temperatures in the teens, they didn’t have to use much imagination.

Their all-day hike meant trekking through a couple of inches of snow up the mountainside and crossing the frozen Spruce Flats waterfall pool. It just goes to show that we do indeed connect people and nature year-round!

The other answer to “What do ya’ll do...” is

that we stay busy with lots of projects.

Two major projects this year were transporting, splitting, and stacking firewood for our two fire circles, and cleaning and repairing tent rain flies for our tent platforms.

Our citizen science program keeps us busy when the creatures are more active so we spend some winter time when they aren’t as active getting up to speed with the importance of data entry from stream salamander studies, our weather station, and our phenology charts.

We replaced our salamander hotels for our aquatic monitoring site and all four of our terrestrial salamanders monitoring sites were revamped.

We create backpacking routes, prep for upcoming programming, and constantly look for ways to improve the lessons with fresh energizing activities.

We make good use of the down time, but we thoroughly enjoy the time we spend outdoors seeping in the last remaining joys of winter.

If Fodderstack Could Speak

You may know already that a history of Walker Valley was published last year in book form in celebration of Tremont’s 40th anniversary. The book is titled *A Home in Walker Valley: The Story of Tremont* (Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2009), and was written by Tremont Special Program Coordinator, Jeremy Lloyd.

But did you know that there is a lot more about this place than he could fit into the book?

This year Tremont’s e-newsletter, which arrives in our email in-box every other Thursday afternoon, will feature a series of articles by Jeremy that dive deeper into Walker Valley lore, under the heading IF FODDERSTACK COULD SPEAK.

Learn more about old home sites, murderer Hobbie Stinnett, Walker Valley moonshiners, legendary mountaineer Sam Cook, preacher Fred Webb, and Camp Margaret Townsend.

If you do not have a copy of *A Home in Walker Valley*, make sure to pick up one the next time you visit Tremont. And, catch all the stories, along with other great news from Tremont, by signing up for the e-newsletter today. Just go to www.gsmmit.org/newsletters.html and click on Walker Valley Reflections. Here you can read back issues of our printed newsletter or sign up to receive the bi-weekly e-newsletter.

Sign up now! Jeremy’s articles will be made available exclusively to e-news subscribers, so don’t miss out on this unique opportunity to learn more about one of your favorite places in the Smokies.

Heather Davis

(*Smileloticus adventurum*)

Description

This chipper species is always a joy to spot no matter whether in the



office or the deciduous forests she prefers.

Habitat/Range

This species can often be found in front of a computer but

her preferred habitat is outside, often in sunny patches. She has been spotted as far away as Costa Rica, Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Belize, Guatemala, Paris, London, and Mexico.

Behaviors

This species enjoys a wide range of behaviors, including rec league soccer, board games and even kayaking. She’s a strong species with excellent endurance, having run more than one half-marathon in the company of her mate, Josh.

Song

This species prefers to sing from concealed perches, inside moving vehicles, or from the relative safety of a flock of altos in the church choir. Listen for her song year round.

Interactions with Other Species

She interacts well with all animals, particularly pugs. Has even been observed taking these dogs into her nest and serving as a foster family.

Migration

This species seems to have trouble with navigation, but after her recent migration from middle TN, she and her mate are establishing a territory in the Maryville vicinity.

This field guide entry is an invitation to all of you to make a positive ID of our new office mate in technology and marketing.



Looking Ahead

In addition to our year-round school programs, we offer youth, family, and adult programs. Visit www.gsmmit.org, call (865) 448-6709, or e-mail mail@gsmmit.org for more information on our offerings!

April

Spring Photography Workshop

April 23-26, 2010

Join nationally recognized photographer Bill Lea and his team of photographers on an unforgettable learning experience in the Smokies. Bill will work with you at your skill level lecture sessions are sure to leave everyone with something new. But the field trips are the heart of this program. This weekend is chosen as an ideal time to capture the mountains in springtime: rushing waters, emerging flowers, spring colors, and changing weather. This year’s field trips are scheduled to hit new areas on the Foothills Parkway, Chimney’s Picnic Area, and possibly Elkmont. Space is limited so register now!

Cost: \$582

May

SANCP*—Birds of the Smokies

May 7-9, 2010

If you are just getting into birds or a seasoned birder, you’ll find something new in this weekend component of our popular Naturalist Certification Program. Join Tremont Education Director John DiDiego and Teacher Naturalist Josh Davis as we share tips and identify field issues in avian conservation and plenty of time in the field observing some of the Smokies’ most beautiful inhabitants. This year we are planning to incorporate an early morning bird banding session to see birds CLOSE UP!

Cost: \$274

SANCP*—Plants

May 7-9, 2010

Great Smoky Mountains is renowned for its plant diversity—come learn the basics of sorting all of those species into recognizable taxonomic groups and their associated communities. Executive Director John DiDiego will lead this component of our popular Naturalist Certification Program that will include woody and herbaceous plant ID, tips and tricks for recognizing species and family groups in the field, and lectures aimed at increasing your overall knowledge of plants.

Cost: \$274



Birdwatching Morning!

May 15, 2010

Bird diversity is at its height during the spring migration—join Executive Director Ken Voorhis for a half-day of birding along the Foothills Parkway. This is a great program for beginning or

experienced birders—learn to recognize some avian friends by sight and by song!

Cost: \$20

June

Smoky Mountains Family Camp

June 28-July 3, 2010

Haven’t decided on a family trip this summer? We combined all of the excitement of summer camp with the fun of a family vacation and we recommend... Smoky Mountains Family Camp! This week is fun for all ages—with hikes and explorations for the energetic, wildlife discoveries for the curious, and entertainment and relaxation for everyone. We offer choices each day for you to create your own vacation while sharing quality time and making memories for a lifetime.

Cost: \$1,050 for a family of four (\$210 each additional person).

July

SANCP*—Aquatic Natural

History

July 5-7, 2010

Water has been called the lifeblood of the Appalachians—it helped shape the mountains themselves and streams continue to be corridors of life in the forests of the Smokies. Join us and a few ways to “dred” in the waters of the Smokies, learning the ecology of streams and learning a great deal about the array of species that contribute to the diversity of aquatic life. This is one of the eight Naturalist Certification courses we offer during the year.

Cost: \$274

SANCP*—Reptiles and Amphibians

July 7-9, 2010

The Smokies boasts a healthy population of amphibians and reptiles. Although these secretive species are not often seen, they are a part of the fabric of diversity that is the hallmark of the national park. Senior Teacher Naturalist Josh Davis will guide you through this fascinating hidden world through presentations, field trips, and discussions. Learn how these species live and interact with their environment and learn how they help us understand the ecological impacts of the changes in the forest structure. Learn to identify common species and see some of them close up. This course is a component of the Naturalist Certification Program.

Cost: \$274

Naturalist Hiking Week

July 5-10, 2010

If you want to really see the Smokies, this is the week for you! Choose from at least two different hiking options each day led by our experienced naturalist staff. Then after each hike, come back to relax in a rocking chair, and enjoy the evenings among others who share a love for the culture and landscapes of the Smokies. If you’d like to take a break from hiking, we will also offer classes during the day on a variety of engaging, nature-related subjects. This year, we will also feature artist Bob Grimac who will be leading a session on making kaleidoscopes from scratch!

Cost: \$408



Albright Grove Hike

July 7, 2010

The Smokies still harbor some of the old trees that made up the forests prior to the logging era. Albright Grove is perhaps the best example of the old growth forest complete with massive trees, intact soils, and the distinctive look and feel of an ancient forest. Join a Tremont teacher naturalist for an inside look at this magical place and come away with a new understanding and appreciation of what the Smokies were and what they someday will be again! This will be about a seven-mile hike with some elevation gain. Lunch and trail snacks provided by Tremont.

Cost: \$25



Appalachian Celebration

July 9, 2010

These mountains embody much to celebrate and each summer we partner with the Great Smoky Mountains Heritage Center to host an evening to do just that. As the sun goes down into the hills, we’ll gather in the open-air theater for an evening of entertainment and music. Be mesmerized by Storyteller Elizabeth Rose as she charms you with her vivacious stories woven with wit, humor, and expressive enthusiasm. And don’t be shy about tapping your foot and singing along with the Pair Family. Be captivated by their traditional mountain music played under the stars. For just \$5 you can be a part of this growing tradition and enjoy an unforgettable evening.

Cost: \$5 at the door

*Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification Program

2009 STAFF

teacher/naturalists

Brian Ballenger
Nathan Daniel
Adam Leiterman
Michael Matzko
Christina McCoy
Lindsay Menard
Tesha Omeis
Mary Silver
Kim Wagner
Tyson Wepprich

summer teacher/ naturalists

Mickey Larkins
Allison Madison
Katherine Selby

environmental education summer interns

Daniell Althaus
Jarrett Beecher
Angela Booher
Timothy Jenkins

summer science research interns

Elizabeth Davis
Alex Durand
Amanda Kelly
Keane Secrist

George Fry science education chair

Tyson Wepprich

senior teacher/naturalist

Josh Davis

school program coordinator

Jen Martin

special program coordinator

Jeremy Lloyd

program specialist

Mary Dresser

education director

John DiDiego

food service director

Steve Foster

food service

Mechelle Crowe
Linda Hatcher
Sherry McCollum
Lisa Russell
Emma Lou Willison

grounds & facilities

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Ron Hood

assistant office manager

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Sandra Byrd
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Photos: John DiDiego (14), GSMIT Archives (cover, 2, 7), Lora Irwin (cover), Jonathan Key (cover), Les McGlassen (7, 12, 13), Shelly Powell (12), Mary Silver (cover, 10)

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Program brochures are available by contacting our office: www.gsmmit.org • (865) 448-6709 • mail@gsmmit.org

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