

Young pioneers learn outdoor skills at Phillips Farm

Latah County and Moscow Parks and Recreation departments, along with the Friends of Phillips Farm, reestablished the children summer camps first started at the farm by Loreca Stauber nearly 30 years ago during two weeklong sessions of Pioneer Day Camp in July.

Story and photos by Seth Toebe

While the heat of mid-July settled in on the Palouse and wildfires in central Washington gave the skies a smoky haze, kids from across the county went to Phillips Farm to explore nature and learn the pioneer skills needed by settlers to live on the land.

"The first day of the camp the kids set up a shelter," said director Nicole Campbell.



Nicole Campbell, director of the Pioneer Day camp, leads a discussion on nature with children taking part in the weeklong session.

work the land. The Palouse soil might be more fertile than most, but it took a lot of hard work to chop and cut the wood, build the houses and barns, plant seeds and harvest the crops, cook and can the food.

From 1944-1972, Farmer Phillips did just that, and his work still shows. The pond that Phillips constructed to water his crops

and livestock now provides habitat for moose, waterfowl, and many amphibians, making an excellent spot for Pioneer explorers.

His old orchard, though not yet ready for harvest this year, is the perfect grove to hear, see, touch, and taste the difference between wild and cultivated plants. It seems Mr. Phillips knew just what he was thinking when he bequeathed his 160-acre farm in 1972 to the City of Moscow "for the benefit and use of the children of Moscow for recreation purposes."

Over the last 40 years, many children have enjoyed Phillips' original gift. This July at the Pioneer Day Camp, about 15 seven to ten year-olds were the benefactors.

To bring the farm park to its current state with all its offerings, though, has taken the help of many, which is a point not lost on Nicole, the camp director.

"It's a team effort getting the farm ready for the camp," said Nicole gratefully, as she watched the fruit of all the labor on the smiling kid's faces as they enjoyed some wild thimbleberries.

For over a decade now, Friends of Phillips Farm (FPF) has been part of the team working to develop this great gift.

Expanding Phillips' original vision, FPF serves "to educate children and adults about natural and managed eco-systems with an emphasis on exploring and learning from nature."

One of FPF's key team players is board member, and Moscow High School French and Biology teacher, Lee Anne Eareckson.

"We really wanted to bring back the day camps that Loreca Stauber started 30 years ago," Lee Anne said. "When we hired Nicole and Chelsea, we knew we were on our way."

The pioneer campers ended their weeks with an archaeological dig. Map and compass in hand, they set out to navigate the problem-solving scenario given to them by their watchful directors.

What did Nicole say she wanted campers to find and take with them from the experience? "Good memories of a summer with their eyes open to all the things that nature has to offer."

If you see any of the Friends of Phillips Farm, a staff member of our community Park and Recreation departments, or any city or county officials, make sure to tell them thanks for keeping the vision of Virgil Phillips alive.

And stop by Phillips Farm to explore it again yourself, if you haven't been there lately. His gift should be enjoyed by all.



Chelsea Rose (top left), assistant director for Pioneer Day Camp at Phillips Farm County Park, leads young campers in hydrating before a hike. Two weeklong camps for kids were held in mid-July, helping them gain a better understanding for nature and living outdoors. The camps were sponsored by the Parks and Recreation Departments of Latah County and Moscow, along with Friends of Phillips Farm, Inc.

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