

When All Education Was Outdoor Education

The ongoing efforts at DNR to encourage more outdoor activities and hands-on environmental education—especially among Illinois youth—aren't new. In fact, they weren't even our idea. The new programs we introduce and the various environmental education workshops we develop on a regular basis simply carry on a human tradition we all can trace to our earliest ancestors.

It's perfectly natural that outdoor education should matter to everybody today. People have been teaching the next generation about nature and the environment for millennia. There was a time, for example, not very long ago, when important knowledge included knowing which trees provided the best wood to make a bow, or how to start a fire with that bow, or knowing which bark provided the strongest fibers for weaving string.

For many thousands of years, people understood more about nature than many of us today because people probably spent all of their daily life outdoors. What was once common teaching for students of nature—knowing edible and toxic



plants, or how to chip a spear out of stone—somehow seems unnecessary or quaint to many of us today.

Far from it. Understanding life outdoors and sharing and conserving those natural resources are of critical importance in this age of global environmental peril. As we look forward, to leave future generations a healthy and well-managed

environment we must begin by looking back to see what has mattered for ages. This month provides an excellent opportunity for thousands of people in Illinois to get a glimpse of life in an era when hands-on environmental education was part of daily life.

At the annual Fort Massac Encampment, scheduled for Oct. 16-17 at Fort Massac State Park in Metropolis (see inside back cover for details), thousands of participants and visitors, many dressed in early pioneer and military garb, will converge on Illinois' first state park to celebrate our shared human heritage and recall how this strategic Ohio River overlook helped forge a new nation.

In central Illinois, make plans to attend the Oct. 2-3 and Oct. 9-10 (8:30-5

each day) Rendezvous at Spoon River, held on the grounds of the Dickson Mounds Museum near Lewistown. A branch of the Illinois State Museum and a National Historic Site, Dickson Mounds is one of the major on-site archaeological museums in the United States and offers a unique opportunity to explore the world of the American Indian in an awe-inspiring journey through 12,000 years of human experience in the Illinois River Valley. Rendezvous re-enactors depict the early 1800s—from their dress and lodging to their blanket trade and demonstrations of spoon carving, jewelry making, lace making, constructing bows and arrows and other period activities.

Throughout the fall months, adult mentors take to the field to enjoy two passions—hunting and passing along outdoor traditions to the next generation. Whether their time is spent huddled in a duck blind, scouting for deer sign in advance of an archery hunt or positioning themselves in the corn stubble waiting for the doves to fly, theirs is quality time away from the distractions of the office and school.

Autumn is a prime season for enjoying Illinois' rich natural and cultural resources. Make the time this year to share your love of nature with the young people in your life. Settle back around the campfire and recount your day's catch of bluegill. Hike our scarlet-hued forests and earth-toned prairies. Celebrate our heritage and the bounty of harvest at a fall festival.

Enjoy Illinois' natural heritage.

Marc Miller, Director

Mycologist Patrick Leacock of the Field Museum in Chicago explains to young nature explorer Henry Sues how the gills beneath the caps of Jack o' Lantern (*Omphalotus illudens*) mushrooms glow.

