Taft Campus Joins the Oregon Trail Days Festival

As we sometimes discuss in our Pioneer Life classes, this area was once a part of “the wild west.” In the early to middle part of the 19th century, you might have experienced settler/Native American encounters (some friendly, some not), covered wagons, and horse thieving criminal rings. On July 20-21, Lorado Taft Campus had the opportunity to participate in Oregon’s Trail Days Festival. Held at adjacent Lowden State Park and Taft Campus, the festival celebrated this part of our history. Events included Wild West shows, Native American drumming and dancers, traders, pioneer games, and craftsmen demonstrating a variety of historical crafts. The festival also celebrated the strong history of art in the Oregon area. Art activities featuring working artists, projects for kids, and art colony historical tours of Taft Campus were part of the experience. Taft Campus was featured in other ways as well. We opened up our pioneer cabin, giving tours and conducting hands-on candle dipping and tool use activities. A quilt show was held in Poley, and the dining hall was open to the public for breakfast one morning. Pioneer games were also held in the open area near the chimney. In addition, our trails were part of the festival’s Rugged River Run, and many of the entertainers stayed in our dorms. This was the 4th year for the Trail Days Festival, but our first year being involved. The proceeds from the festival go toward the restoration of the Blackhawk Statue. For information about next year’s festival, visit their website at www.oregontraildays.org.

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(All Photos Taken By Melanie Costello)
Lorado Taft Field Campus Education Staff 2013-14

Bottom Row: From left to right
Tom Sturtevant
Heidi Vasel
Gael Zembal
Stefanie Landman
Vicki Morrison
Amy Banner
Melanie Costello
Joshua Hapner
Jared Wicks

Top Row: From left to right
Kendra Swanson
Jacob Sim

Jacob Sim
Hometown: Ironwood, MI
College/Degree: Lake Superior State University; Parks and Rec.
Favorite Constellation: Orion
Favorite Taft Class: Birding

Stefanie Landman
Hometown: Woodstock, NY
College/Degree: Alfred University; Environmental Studies & Sociology
Favorite Constellation: Orion
Favorite Taft Class: Teambuilding

Amy Banner
Hometown: Youngstown, OH
College/Degree: Ursuline College; Historic Preservation
Favorite Constellation: Pleiades
Favorite Taft Class: Pioneering

Tom Sturtevant
Hometown: Jarrettsville, MD
College/Degree: Millersville University; Meteorology
Favorite Constellation: Boötes
Favorite Taft Class: Night Hikes

Vicki Morrison
Hometown: Canton, MI
College/Degree: Central Michigan University; Environmental Education
Favorite Constellation: Cassiopeia
Favorite Taft Class: Orienteering/GPS

Gael Zembal
Hometown: Fridley, MN
College/Degree: University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management, Spanish minor
Favorite Constellation: Orion
Favorite Taft Class: Pioneering
Taft Campus Joins the Oregon Trail Days Festival
(Continued from page 1)

The festival proved to be a great opportunity for NIU’s new president, Doug Baker and his wife, Dana Stover, to make their first visit to Taft Campus. After enjoying breakfast and the view in the dining hall, they were given the V.I.P. tour by Taft’s Acting Director, Melanie Costello, and Conference Coordinator, Diana Dennis. President Baker was familiar with our outdoor education programming; as provost of the University of Idaho, he was involved with their McCall Outdoor Science School. After the Taft tour, the NIU group learned about the history of the Blackhawk statue from retired Taft professors Bud Weiner and Cliff Knapp and explored the remainder of the festival offerings.

The Trail Days Festival Committee and the Taft staff agreed that our involvement in the festival was a positive addition. We really enjoyed the opportunity to open the campus to the community and far-from-home visitors alike.

“Knot” Your Everyday Worm

You should always keep your eyes open as you wander this amazing world we live in. You never know what you might find! This past summer I was hiking through one of the gullies that crisscrosses Taft Campus when I came across a discarded 2-liter soda pop bottle. Now, to many people this may be just a piece of rubbish, but I recognized it as a tiny ecosystem. Specifically, this was an aquatic ecosystem due to the rainwater that the bottle had filled with. As I looked closer, I noticed a remarkable thing – a long thin white worm slowly moving around in the water. This was no normal earthworm either – I recognized it immediately as a Horsehair Worm, something I’d only ever had the pleasure of seeing once before in my life.

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“Knot” Your Everyday Worm

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The Horsehair Worm is also known as the “Gordian Worm” in reference to an old tale about Alexander the Great. In this story, Alexander is said to have been confronted with the problem of untying the fabled “Gordian Knot”, which had been tied by the son of the first king of Phrygia some centuries before. This knot was so complex that no one had ever been able to untie it. The Horsehair Worm got the nickname Gordian Worm as they are very long and tend to twine back and forth over themselves, tying themselves up into a knotted ball. This is especially true during mating, when multiple worms may get tangled up together.

In addition to having an interesting namesake, the Horsehair Worm also has an amazing life story. When the young worms hatch from their eggs, they first live as larval parasites of beetles, cockroaches, crickets, grasshoppers, and similar insects. The young insect grows to adulthood inside its host, living off the nutrients of the host’s own body. It is quite amazing how large the adult worm can finally grow to inside its insect host – eventually taking up a fairly large percentage of the inside of the host’s body. When it is time for the adult worm to emerge and begin the next part of its life cycle, it actually takes over at least partial control of the host’s body and causes it to seek out water and drown itself. Once the hapless insect has done so, the worm can emerge into the water and begin the next part of its life where it lives as an aquatic worm, seeking to find others of its kind to mate with in order to lay eggs and start the cycle anew.

Move over science fiction! A strange being that inhabits its host and grows inside it while controlling its brain! A strange and horrible alien species? No! A simple worm, living right here on earth. Don’t worry though, the horsehair worm poses no threat to humans – it only parasitizes insects. So, if one day you come across one of these amazing Nematomorphs (as they are called by scientists), don’t be frightened. Instead, observe this intriguing fellow inhabitant of this wonderful world we live in. Also, next time you’re out for a walk, don’t forget to keep your eyes open, and don’t overlook even the tiniest of ecosystems out there. You never know when a puddle, a rotten log, or even a piece of discarded trash may hold a wonder the likes of which you’ve never seen!

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horsehair_worm

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Zero Ort!

Congratulations to the following schools for having ZERO ORT during a meal at Taft!

Clinton Rosette Project Leadership,

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Taft Times Contributors:

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Taft Campus Joins the Oregon Trail Days Festival
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