



Walker Valley REFLECTIONS

The newsletter of Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont • Winter 2011

MAY THE
WARMTH AND PEACE OF THE
holiday season
BE YOURS NOW AND
THROUGHOUT THE COMING
new year!

From the Executive Director

Classroom Without Walls

The teacher in this story is fictional, but the challenges described are not. They represent a composite of anecdotes that we've heard from teachers who are very real.

Mr. Atkins teaches 5th grade for an urban school district. He got into teaching because he wanted to make a difference. He is a really smart guy who loves science. Tapping into kids natural curiosity and getting them excited about learning is a focus that keeps him going.

He has convinced the other teachers on his team as well as the school's principal that taking the entire 5th grade class to Great Smoky Mountains National Park for a five-day program at Tremont is a good idea. Doing so was no easy task.

His principal reminded him that "our kids' test scores are not what they need to be. We really need to be on task with teaching the standards in all areas, and time out of the classroom is not something we should be doing."

Mr. Atkins replied, "The experience of being outside the classroom walls and learning from what we can observe in the national park will build on and make real what we are learning in our textbooks. We WILL be teaching to the standards, and we will be doing it for more than just five hours a day."

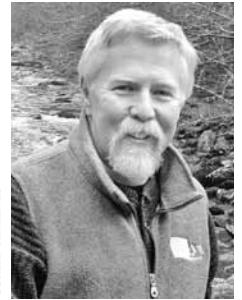
Over time the principal, impressed by Mr. Atkins' enthusiasm, persistence, and willingness to take on all of the extra work to prepare for the trip, agreed to give it a try.

Further enthusiasm and arm-twisting was required to convince other teachers on his team that being away from home, supervising kids 24/7 during the trip, living with them in a dormitory, helping teach and lead hikes in a very different environment, assisting with fundraising, and helping to plan the trip, were all worth it. They all eventually agreed and committed as well.

Next there was getting buy-in from parents who would have to pay for the program and transportation to get the students to Tremont. This required more work than expected.

Oh, and then scheduling the bus, working with Tremont staff to get the proper permission slips and other necessary forms, and building a schedule of lessons and activities that would best meet their curriculum needs and teaching standards—all that on top of long days of teaching, grading papers at night, and preparing for the next day.

When funds from the parents trickled in, it became



GSMIT ARCHIVES

obvious that what they could provide, along with funds they had raised from bake sales and support they got from a local business, was not going to be enough to bring all the kids. But, thanks to generous donors, Tremont was able to provide some scholarship funds, and the teachers themselves actually chipped in so that the last couple of kids could come.

October came and their five days at Tremont were everything they expected. Mr. Atkins' students learned and experienced things they never could have inside the classroom.

One of his co-teachers commented, "The change in the kids after a trip like this is incredible. They view learning differently and they view us teachers and each other differently. We can build on so many things that happened here throughout the year."

After five days they were tired and ready to go home, but the teachers all said that it was well worth it. The magic that Tremont utilizes in the classroom without walls is powerful stuff. And the memories are priceless.

Teachers like Mr. Atkins and his team do heroic work everyday. We hear a lot these days about underachieving schools and students and teachers who don't care.

What I know from working every year with hundreds of educators like Mr. Atkins is that they are up against huge challenges, pressures, demands, and metrics.

We need teachers like these desperately and they need to be rewarded for doing the extra things that they know enhance their students' learning experience, like taking a trip to Tremont, or just getting outside the classroom walls.

I hear from teachers now more than ever about the pressures and how the lack of respect they receive are wearing them down. These are positive, smart, experienced and talented educators.

One told me recently, "This trip to Tremont helps me get through the year."

To those teachers who do all the work to bring a group to Tremont: We know and appreciate that it takes a great deal of effort. Thank you for knowing that it is worth it and being there for your students. You are our heroes!

Ken Voorhis
GSMIT Executive Director

The Brilliant Jewels of Fall

By Tiffany Beachy, citizen science coordinator



Every year millions of little winged creatures prepare for a grand movement south. They grace our gardens, town parks, mountaintops, and open fields. They can be seen hovering on the wind high in a deep blue autumn sky; and sometimes they converge on an area in masses that darken the sky and trees.

No, I'm not talking about migratory birds, but the fragile brilliant orange and black jewels of fall—monarch butterflies!

In the fall, an adult monarch will emerge from its pupa with a mission: fly south, eat nectar, fly some more, eat nectar, and end up in the chilly highlands of Mexico. These monarchs live up to 9 months, whereas most adult butterflies live only 2-3 months.

Since these Monarchs don't nectar throughout the winter, it is essential for them to conserve energy. When spring comes, they begin to fly north again, stopping to reproduce along the way before they die. The spring migration north is then a migration by generations, where the wintering adults' grandchildren and great grandchildren make it back to Minnesota or Tennessee or Canada.



PHOTOS BY TIFFANY BEACHY



Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont has been involved with tagging monarchs and inventorying other butterfly species for many years. This is naturally a very popular program for all ages because volunteers get to frolic around sunny fields in Cades Cove with butterfly nets.

Participants use field guides to identify the species they find, which contributes to the park's All Taxa

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Twenty-eight different species of Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) including monarchs were caught this fall, as well as a few other arthropods and critters as follows:

- Common Buckeye
- Pipeline Swallowtail
- Pearl Crescent
- Eastern Tailed Blue
- Black Swallowtail
- Gulf Fritillary
- Cloudless Sulfur
- Clouded Sulfur
- Common Wood Nymph
- Great Spangled Fritillary
- Orange Sulfur
- Meadow Fritillary
- Forage Looper Moth
- Viceroy
- Zebulon Skipper
- Peck's Skipper
- Checkered Skipper
- Red-spotted Purple
- Confused Eusarca (moth)
- Variegated Fritillary
- Sachem Skipper
- Fiery Skipper
- Diana Fritillary (female)
- Vetch Looper Moth
- Sleepy Orange
- Tiger Swallowtail
- Gray Hairstreak
- Preying mantis
- Southern Two-striped Walking Stick (*Anisomorpha buprestoides*)—a mating pair, and only the second officially recorded in the park!
- Various grasshoppers
- Checking IDs, but we had a possible Modest Katydid, a possible Keeler's Spurthroated grasshopper, and a possible Band winged grasshopper
- Golden orb weaver spiders
- Wolf spiders with egg sacs and babies
- Locust Borer beetle
- Baby black rat snake

An Unlikely Storyteller

By Kenton McKasson, summer teacher/naturalist

The southern Appalachians are known for their rich history of storytelling spread through oral propagation. Tremont helps to maintain this tradition through the stories told at campfires, on hikes, in the dining hall, and anywhere else people converse while participating in programs.

Tales range from factual to utter nonsense. While on a recent backpacking trip, I was reminded of how whimsical this tradition truly is.

After we all had our fill of hydrated beans, hydrated rice, and pre-hydrated cookies, we set out on a stick-collecting mission.

"I want ten sticks from everyone! This is your admission to the campfire," I explained.

With that, everyone was on their way searching for the driest, stoutest sticks they could find. It didn't take terribly long before we had amassed enough fuel to heat a small log home for a week in the heart of winter.

Very delicately a group of young campers began assembling the fire. Starting with the smallest material we had collected, they created a bird's nest-like foundation. Around this they placed slightly larger sticks in the form of a teepee. The whole thing was then sporadically decorated with an assortment of dried leaves and pine needles, both green and brown for contrast.

It was time for the ceremonial match lighting. Would it take only one to get the blaze going? Carefully one of the young

campers struck a match on the box and gently placed it in the bird's nest at the base of the structure... nothing, then some smoke, then visible flame. Mission accomplished! Now it was time for the fun to commence.

As is tradition, the campfire began with a rousing song. The tune of choice on this occasion was a very calm and collected version of "Bubble Gum." Typically this melody would be an eardrum splitting cacophony of destruction, but we had neighbors and needed to follow "leave no trace" protocols.

Next up jokes were shared by young and old; each told their best knee slappers. Some of the jokes evoked actual laughter, but most summoned up only hearty groans from the audience due to the high level of corniness each possessed.

Then it happened—one of the younger campers asked for a story. The leaders looked around at each other wondering which one would deliver the sermon on this night.

Just then a tiny eleven-year-old girl raised her hand. "I have a story that I've heard at Tremont every year I was here. I hate this story it is so stupid. I have heard Brian (a former teacher/naturalist) tell it at least three times. Oh man, do I hate this story!" she said with clear disdain. It was obvious by the tone of her voice that this young girl really wanted to tell this story that nauseated her so immensely.

"This is a story about a fish named

Herman," she stated clearly and with astonishing confidence. Most of the staff had also heard this story and were interested to see what her version would sound like.

As she told the story, it was clear something special was happening. Everyone in the circle was intently hanging on every word that came out of the young girl's mouth. Her articulation was perfect, the phrasing was breathtaking, and her tone was impeccable!

At each dramatic pause, the audience would lean just a little bit closer in anticipation of what would come next. Not once did she become twisted in her words or unclear in her presentation. It was fantastic!

At the conclusion, all that could be heard was the crackling of the wood in the fire. Then a sudden burst of applause was directed at the young master storyteller.

As I looked around at the smiling faces, I realized that I had just witnessed something magical, a story reaffirmed and embedded into the fertile minds of the next group of young orators—continuing a true Appalachian tradition.

Through the voice of a young girl who has come to the Smokies many times, I was reminded of just how extraordinary and wonderful this park is, and the impact it can have on the individuals and groups who spend even a fleeting moment in its presence.

The Brilliant Jewels of Fall

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Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI). When you tag a monarch, your name is included on the datasheet, and you receive a certificate if your monarch is found elsewhere.

We continue to tag these little gems because we still don't know or understand everything about their migration, the routes they take, or even why they go, and we want to monitor the population.

Recently our own Wanda DeWard caught a monarch in her yard that was already tagged—and NOT by us!

It turned out this little guy was tagged by a volunteer! This is one more piece in the puzzle—and this is why we keep tagging!

Each year brings unpredictable cycles; 2011 seems to be a low year for the monarchs. Although the population as a whole is still doing okay, numbers are slowly declining due to loss of habitat. We tagged 31 monarchs this season.

The volunteer numbers were as high as ever this year—and we are very thankful for everyone who took the time to come out and go butterflying with us! This season we had volunteers from all over the Southeast.

Remember! This is a project that you can do at home! Just visit the Monarch Watch website at: www.monarchwatch.org to order nets, tags, datasheets, and everything you'll need to get started in your own backyard!

Connecting with Nature: A Personal Reflection

By Natalie Holland, summer intern

Natalie Holland spent this past summer with us as an Environmental Education Summer Intern. Each year a number of college students or recent graduates gain experience in environmental education in this way. If you or someone you know is interested in pursuing a summer internship with us, visit www.gsmi.org for more information. The deadline for receiving applications is February 20, 2012.

My first memories of interacting with nature involve the backyard of my childhood home and the woods behind it. I remember putting out all types of bird feeders and sitting on the patio watching various species of birds visit. I dug for earthworms and awaited the arrival of at least two "zipper spiders" each year.

Since our house backed up to the woods surrounding the Natchez Trace Parkway, I had the perfect place to take our dog out hiking for an hour or two. I remember these afternoons as very special because, as such a small child, everything seemed so big to me.

Having a place so close to my house where I could see no evidence of civilization was a very neat early experience. I was lucky to have the chance to just get outside. I spent many days and nights in my own yard either on my own, with my sister, or with my parents just being a kid and having fun in nature.

My parents were very instrumental in teaching me to love nature. They took me on numerous family camping trips that allowed me to see a lot of the Southeast. One

place that we traveled to several times was Cheaha State Park in Alabama.

I'm pretty sure that my sister learned to ride her bike on the loop in Cheaha's campground, and I recall several long nights of thunderstorms spent in our tent. The hike down to the lake, however, is a memory that really sticks out as an important outdoor experience I had with my family.



DAWN DEXRAZE

top. I was covered in sweat, but feeling like my family and I had really triumphed that slope together.

I think it was trips like this that helped me learn to love being in the natural world, and how good it can feel to step outside your comfort zone and do something that really challenges you. I am forever grateful to my parents for providing these opportunities for my family.

My summer as an intern at Tremont provided more learning opportunities and awe-inspiring moments than I ever could have imagined. One particular moment that sticks out in my mind occurred

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The Importance of Being Outdoors

By Caleb Carlton, teacher/naturalist

I've been privileged to have plenty of playtime throughout my life. Looking back over the years, I can now see how incredibly formative those unstructured times were. I worked out so many issues while playing—everything from 9/11 (in the woods) to my grandfather's death (on the trampoline).

When things got tough, there was always the option to play, to release it all, to find myself again. Today, as an adult, I use my unstructured time outdoors to think deeply on big-people issues, to find my way, to achieve a sense of clarity, to discover simple pleasures, to harness peace... to let it all go.

To acknowledge the fact that children today play far less than they used to is to recognize the fast-paced times that we are witnessing. And with this lack of play comes a wave of research linking the absence of unstructured time to troubling behaviors.

John Muir once stated that "everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the body and soul."

As children participate in such activities less and less, and as such places become more and more scarce, it is obvious that we are robbing our youth of an essential piece of growing up. And that is why we believe so passionately in what we do here at Tremont, and why we value this national park, this amazing and mysterious space, so much.

For a great article that highlights the link between decreased playtime and increased troubling behaviors in USA Today, go to <http://yourlife.usatoday.com/parenting-family/story/2011-09-25/Less-play-time-equals-more-troubled-kids-experts-say/50531770/1>.

Caleb's article first appeared in the October 14, 2011 edition of Tremont's e-news. To receive this bi-weekly e-publication, call (865) 448-6709 or send a request to mail@gsmi.org.

A Spectacular Prestige

By Zac Schnell, summer intern

There are kids who just show up at Tremont, and there are kids who have an experience like none other, living and learning in Great Smoky Mountain National Park.

Many people ask, "What's it like to work with 9 to 12 year olds?" With a smiling smirk, it is easy to reply, "It's like experiencing a magic trick over and over again."

Many magic tricks contain three steps—The Pledge, The Turn, and The Prestige. Kids at Tremont experience these three steps.

First, the "pledge" is where the magician shows the audience something that appears normal. The magician (or teacher/naturalist) presents games and activities that appear to be just another game. In reality there are hidden objectives that create a layer of learning. The kids witness and enjoy the "pledge," because they are being shown something that appears normal to them such as a tree with leaves.

After the "pledge" the second step is witnessed. It's called the "turn," where the magician makes an ordinary act seem extraordinary. The "turn" occurs when the naturalist points out all the functions of a tree and its leaves.

For example, explaining all of the photosynthesis that is occurring, or why this particular tree grows



If you've been on the Tremont campus recently, you may have noticed our "Green Action Point" signs, signifying ways we are practicing what we teach. Weighing food waste after each meal is a daily part of our curriculum with schools and a good example of our "green practices." You'll also see numerous recycle containers as you cross campus, providing both participants and visitors an environmentally friendly way to dispose of unwanted articles than can be recycled.

Twenty-five schools from nine different states brought students to Tremont this fall. Forty-one more school groups are already scheduled to visit Tremont between now and the end of the school year! But there is still room for your school so call now for open dates!!

School Groups at Tremont September & October 2011

Akiva School, Nashville, TN
Berrien County Math & Science Center, Berrien Springs, MI
Berry College Middle School, Mount Berry, GA
Burlington Elementary, Burlington, KY
Cherokee Bend Elementary School, Birmingham, AL
Christian Academy of Knoxville, Knoxville, TN
Concord Christian School, Knoxville, TN
Episcopal School of Knoxville, Knoxville, TN
Fall Outdoor Recreation Consortium, Richmond, VA
Grace Christian Academy, Knoxville, TN
Knox Doss Middle School at Drake's Creek, Hendersonville, TN
Mason County Middle School, Maysville, KY
Merrol Hyde Magnet School, Hendersonville, TN
Norris Middle School, Norris, TN
Oliver Springs Elementary, Oliver Springs, TN
Pi Beta Phi Elementary School, Gatlinburg, TN
Robertsburg Middle School, Oak Ridge, TN
Sayre School, Lexington, KY
Shelbyville Middle School, Shelbyville, IN
Stanley Switlik Elementary School, Marathon, FL
Station Camp Middle School, Gallatin, TN
Union Grove Elementary School, Friendsville, TN
Walland Elementary School, Walland, TN
West End Middle School, Nashville, TN
Wydown Middle School, Saint Louis, MO

The Joys of Swinging on a Grape Vine

By Patrick McNamara, teacher/naturalist

It was starting to get dark. We were tired from our long trek to get to this place, yet we still had some energy to spare for the ride. Without seeing a single other soul, we stepped up to one of the most vicious challenges we would face that weekend. This was a test of pure bravery and strength. This is what it means to cross over into the danger zone. Tonight we would become legends.

The challenges of spending a week in the backcountry can be varied and dynamic. Taking all of one's provisions, possessions, and positive thinking can put a wear on the body and mind. But we did it.

This specific challenge started out just as any other day in the backcountry. We woke, took a dip in a cool mountain stream, ate our breakfast, packed our belongings, and headed out into the wild.

We kept our spirits as high as the mountains we climbed that morning and continued to rise to what would be one of the most beautiful stretches of forest we would encounter. After a few miles of hiking, games, and good conversation, we stopped for a simple meal of bagels, jerky, and cheese.

Feeling full and fulfilled by our rest, we returned to the trail. After a couple more miles, we heard the rush of a river. We had already passed over small streams and creeks, but by listening to the sound and feeling the cool mist given off by the river, we could tell that this was a river of substantial magnitude.

After following the river, the trees parted and revealed to us a bridge that we would cross to reach our campsite. One at a time we crossed over the ancient crossing. The

bridge appeared to have supported train cars hauling loads through these old hills. History echoed in this place raising questions of who or what else has crossed this bridge. What else had this bridge seen? What stories could it share?

We were finally there! We saw our campsite and set up our tents. We were hot, tired, yet excited to return to the river for a cool down. Once again we walked one at a time back to the river to immerse ourselves in the refreshing water.

Playing games, skipping rocks, and simply enjoying the therapeutic value of sitting in a river took up a seemingly fast two hours. It was time to head back for supper.

Inspiration struck again as we slow roasted over hot coals the best pita pizzas that anyone ever had the pleasure of tasting. After cleaning up, we heard the calling. There would be one last obstacle to conquer before nightfall, and it was starting to get dark.

Somehow, an ordinary grape vine captivated our attention and interest. Before taking the plunge, a routine inspection was performed by master vine swinger and leader, Jess. It passed his test.

Although each of us was individually challenged by this vine, the whole group pulled together to get through the experience. The trust we put into each other at moments like this transformed our group of individuals into one extreme hiking machine.

The magic that happened on that trip will be something that each participant remembers for many a time to come.



MARY SILVER

THANK YOU!

...to the many generous individuals, organizations, and companies who help support Tremont—allowing us to connect people and nature in Great Smoky Mountains National Park!

If you would like to know more about Tremont's needs, how to contribute, or need help planning a donation, please contact Sandi Byrd at (865) 448-9732 ext. 24 or sandi@gsmi.org.

Donations

From 6/1/11 to 10/15/11:

ANNUAL FUND

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Looking Ahead

Tremont hosts school groups year-round with 3 to 5-day programs crafted to not only meet curriculum needs, but also ensure optimum environmental education value for each student.

Adult programs are also scheduled year-round in a variety of topics that explore both the natural and cultural aspects of Great

JANUARY

Wilderness First Responder

January 15-22, 2012

Wilderness First Responder is an 8-day, 80-hour course in backcountry risk management and life support. This is becoming the standard training for those who lead trips, guide hikes, or do any facilitated programs in the backcountry. Tremont partners with Roane State Community College to offer meals and lodging as well as the incredible setting of Great Smoky Mountains National Park for this course.

Cost: \$795 includes meals, lodging, and instruction



PHOTOS BY GSMT ARCHIVES

Winter Woody Plant ID

January 21, 2012

The Smokies are a great place to explore in the winter! Do you know what to look for to identify trees and shrubs in the winter? Come along with Ken Voorhis into the forest and in the process discover a number of characteristics that will help you do so. For SANCP graduates as well as those who are simply interested in further developing their naturalist skills.

Cost: \$55 per person. Includes a sack lunch. Optional overnight Friday and/or Saturday and breakfast Saturday. Call for details.

FEBRUARY

Family Adventure Weekend

February 10-12, 2012

Family Adventure Weekend is a great way to escape to the outdoors this winter. Enjoy a mini-vacation with your family exploring Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This weekend is chock full of hikes, crafts, games, waterfalls, beautiful views, campfires and plenty of time to enjoy being with the ones you love. Since we provide the

Smoky Mountains National Park

Review the following programs scheduled for early 2012 and we're sure you'll find several that will interest you. For a complete 2012 listing visit www.gsmit.org.

To register or get additional information on any of our programs, call 865-448-6709 or email mail@gsmit.org.

activities AND we do all the cooking, this weekend is sure to be fun and stress-free for the whole family. Program lasts from Friday supper through Sunday lunch.

Cost: \$422 for family of four (\$95 for each additional person). \$50 per person deposit required at registration.

Educators' Workshop: Likin' Lichens

February 17-19, 2012

Lichens—these mysterious organisms have fascinated people for years. Not a plant, not a fungus, but a surprisingly elegant combination of

the two. Spend the weekend delving into the

enchanting world of lichens as we learn their basic ecology, identification, and natural history during this field-based workshop. Workshop lasts from Friday supper to Sunday lunch. Workshop fee includes all instruction, materials, meals, and lodging.

Cost: \$255. Thanks to funding from the North Carolina Department of Transportation, this workshop is available to 10 K-12 teachers for a \$50 non-refundable registration fee. Space is limited to 20 participants so register early.

Interpretation: A Teachable Art

February 17-19, 2012

You will gain rudimentary knowledge regarding the theory and principles of environmental interpretation, as well as learn how to communicate more effectively and develop



a particular location so plan your hunt strategy wisely. The event is great for both locals who will discover new treasures in the park and out-of-towners who want to get an overview in a short period of time. All teams will return to Tremont and enjoy a light dinner as we tally the scores. This event is limited to 200 participants so register early!

Cost: \$50 per team.

APRIL

Spring Hiking Road Scholar

April 9-14, 2012

There's nothing more beautiful than spring in the most rugged mountains in Appalachia! Get ready for daily hikes led by our talented and knowledgeable education staff. You will explore the cultural and natural history of this region with its unique traditions and rich biodiversity. Starting each day with a hot breakfast, you will pack a lunch, grab your daypack, and head out on the trail. Hikes of 5-13 miles will bring you into contact with the varied plant life and wildlife, sparkling mountain streams, and breathtaking mountain vistas of this ancient mountain chain. In the evenings, you will enjoy a delicious meal at Tremont followed by Appalachian music and stories or educational sessions. This is an unforgettable experience you will talk about for months afterwards. Program lasts from Monday supper through Saturday breakfast.

Cost: \$575. Find more information and register at www.roadscholar.org.

Springtime in the Smokies Photography Workshop

April 20-23, 2012

Improve your photography skills in this ideal setting. Bill Lea, a nationally recognized nature photographer, and his top-notch team of instructors will lead you through this workshop emphasizing wildlife, landscape and macro photography. Springtime is glorious in the mountains, and it's the perfect time to refresh your skills or learn new ones. Unlike many photography workshops, our price includes meals, lodging and instruction. Bill and his team tailor each program to the interests and skill level of each individual participant with plenty of one-on-one instruction.

Field sessions and lectures will cover the use of light, composition, and equipment. Program lasts from Friday afternoon to Monday mid-morning.

Bill Lea may be known best for his artistic documentation of deer and bear behavior, the various moods of the Great Smoky Mountains, and southern ecosystems. He is the author or coauthor of several photography books, and over 7,000 of his photos have appeared in publications. His latest book, *Cades Cove: Window to a Secret World*, is in its fourth printing. Visit www.BillLea.com to learn more.

Cost: \$611. Includes meals, lodging, and instruction.

Tremont: Where Imagination and Creativity Rule!

By Dawn Dextraze, teacher/naturalist

When the 5th graders from Concord Christian Academy in Knoxville visited Tremont this fall, they were bubbling over with creative energy.

They hiked to the waterfall and learned about geology; they waded in the frigid waters of the Middle Prong searching for small creatures; and they explored the forest creating debris shelters along the way.

The joy they felt from learning and growing in the great outdoors was evident on their smiling faces and could be heard in their laughter.

I asked their teacher if they had any outdoor space at their school and she told me that they had a forested area until just recently.

When the students returned home after their visit to Tremont last year, they created debris shelters during recess. They added to the shelters all year and created a small community where imagination and creativity ruled.

Unfortunately, that forested area was cut down and replaced by an additional parking lot this year.



TIFFANY BEACHY
Here students from Concord Christian Academy in Knoxville, enjoy their newly constructed shelter.

sense of confidence for today's children."

The story about these children and their loss of the shelter area they had created helped me realize the special role Tremont can play in students' lives, especially for students that do not have green spaces in their schoolyards in which to play.

Connecting with Nature: A Personal Reflection

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one late afternoon.

I had gone for a swim at Tremont's usual spot in the river, and had taken a pair of goggles to do a little underwater exploration. I was pleasantly surprised to find that I had the whole swimming hole to myself.

After a few minutes, it began to sprinkle, soon followed by a massive downpour. The drops were big and warm, so I climbed up onto a toasty rock to watch. Each drop made a beautiful "counterdrop" as it hit the river.

It seemed that this rain shower had been sent just for me, and as I sat I began to think about how blessed I was to be having this experience. I thought of my family and friends back at home and how fortunate I am to have such a strong support system.

This one brief moment of serenity, solitude, and beauty brought to mind all the good things in my life. It made me feel alive, and I'm pretty sure the smile couldn't be wiped off my face for the rest of the day.

When the rainstorm ended, I took one final jump into the water and then walked back up to campus. I felt a little bit changed and a little bit more ready to face any challenge that would come my way.

Great Smoky Mountains Institute at



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