

# Walker Valley REFLECTIONS

The newsletter of Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont • Summer-Fall 2012

## GO FORTH & GET DIRTY!

*By John DiDiego,  
education director*



NATALIE HOLLAND

Tremont's educational program is a thing of beauty. We get kids discovering the national park, we meet state education standards, and we boast a professional staff that creates a safe learning wonderland for kids of all ages.

We teach people how to enjoy the outdoors in a responsible way that minimizes impact on the land. All of this makes good sense and fits well with our mission of connecting people and nature while fostering stewardship of the park.

But every so often, I worry. I am afraid that this by itself is just not enough. I think about my childhood and how it shaped who I am today. And here's my

confession—I definitely was not 'responsible.'

I was a kid. I killed stuff. I chopped down trees (with a very small hatchet), carved sticks, burned bark with a magnifying glass, built forts, and captured snakes, lizards, and any other reptile or amphibian I could get my hands on.

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# From the Executive Director

*Life After Tremont?*



We have just finished our whirlwind assortment of summer programs. Rewinding through all that happened between the first of June and mid-August is dizzying.

Summer staff and interns have come and gone. The list of programs and events is long and varied. Each of these programs is made up of a myriad of experiences and people that represent a panorama of emotions, discoveries, firsts, wildlife encounters, “oh wow”

moments, victories, sights, smells, and sounds. They can leave one wondering if he/she can really explain what happened to someone who was not there. And then what?

As we shift gears and begin to welcome schools to the park, we wonder the same thing. More than 5,000 students will take part in at least a three-day experience at Tremont with their classmates. They too will learn and experience things that will move them deeply. But what happens when they go back to the classroom?

We’ve spent a lot of time as a staff asking ourselves, “What does happen after the Tremont experience? How do we extend our impact beyond the time spent with us in Great Smoky Mountains National Park? How do we follow people home?

We do know that the impact is lasting. A recent study of education programs in GSMNP showed increased positive outcomes. Outcomes measured included self-assessed learning, attitudes toward school, stewardship attitudes, interest in learning, place attachment to the park, attitudes toward field trips, and behaviors associated with stewardship. The study showed significant increases after our programs on nearly all indices studied. See

more at <http://www.gsmnit.org/evaluation.html>.

We also hear about Tremont impacts from occasional remarks or correspondence from past participants. At a recent meeting with another nonprofit board that I serve on I was walking to the car with a fellow board member and bank executive who told me that he has great memories of his trip to Tremont with his school as a sixth grader. “I still have the stake that marked my secret spot while there...” he said.

This summer I received an e-mail from a parent who was thoughtful enough to take the time to write about the impact Tremont had on her children. She shared some details about her oldest son who attended Tremont summer programs for a number of years and is now a senior at Clemson in Wildlife Biology. She wrote,

“My point in sharing this is to affirm what you already know—and that is, that the programs at Tremont make a difference in the lives of the kids who attend them. Not every child will pursue a career in natural science, but no child will leave a summer youth program at Tremont unchanged. Nathan has had a handful of important influences in his choice of career, Tremont’s being among those. His time at Tremont and his interactions with his leaders there nurtured his own natural interests. It was the first place he got to see grown-ups doing what he loved as a profession.”

We are working on ways to keep in better touch with participants after they go home. We want to provide more ways for them to continue to build on their experience with Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the wild outdoors after leaving us.

Of course, we’d like people to return and join us for another in-depth experience in the mountains. For those who cannot, we want to continue to hear from them about their ongoing experiences in connecting with nature.

There are some interesting on-line opportunities that can help us accomplish this. While we recognize that Tremont can provide a great opportunity to “unplug” for a while from the technology that fills our lives,

we also understand that communication is moving in directions that we need to embrace.

This from an on-line fundraising site: The latest Millennials Donor Report says 77% of millennials use their phones for everything. They’re the future, and so is mobile. Without mobile, there’s no future.

So, we are working to explore and utilize some of these technological opportunities to find ways to extend and enhance the Tremont experience and continue our connection with the community.

How has Tremont impacted you? We are interested in knowing and collecting those stories and sharing them with others.

“Like” us on Facebook and follow what we are up to. Tell your story, share your photos, participate in our Friday Nature Quiz, or look in on what we discovered this week.

If you are not already subscribing to our blog “the Middle Prong Press” (it’s free), you may want to do that as well. Our blog entries are focused on letting you know more about what is going on in Great Smoky Mountains National Park and beyond.

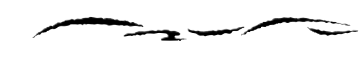
One feature of the blog is a regular HD video podcast that Teacher/Naturalist Caleb Carleton is spearheading. We’ve already received some wonderful feedback from those who have enjoyed the images and discoveries that these podcasts provide. We are also working on developing more on-line resources that educators can use before and after their Tremont experience.

We look forward to seeing all of you who will be discovering the Smokies with us this next school year. For the rest of you, whether you last visited with us this summer, forty years ago, or have not yet been able to get here, you are a part of our community. Come see us soon. But until then, stay connected. There are lots of ways to do so.

Ken Voorhis  
GSMIT Executive Director

# Tremont's Impact on Schools

*By Jennie McGuigan, school program coordinator*



*This is part 1 of a 4-part series following our schools back to the classroom*

There’s something magical about the kind of deep learning that goes on all year long at Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont. After working for years as a classroom teacher in challenging inner-city districts, the 500,000-acre classroom I work in now makes teaching and inspiring students pretty easy, or I should say easier.

When people are asked to think about classroom spaces, most have images of four walls, a floor and ceiling, some desks, computer screens, educational materials, and a few windows.

In some of the best case scenarios, one might even find living plants, animals in terrariums, and on-going projects that develop and respond to their surroundings, environments that tap into our human side with inspirational quotes, music, stories, and artwork.

Some have nourishing elements like natural light and spaces to stretch out, where students can curl up or gather together. And some even have a wide assortment of resources and tools that support our natural curiosity, or lesson materials that reinforce critical thinking skills.

At Tremont, we know that the outdoor classroom is the perfect environment to study all aspects of life as it happens in real time. And fortunately for us, our ‘living classroom’ is already set up and fully equipped to stimulate all the students’ senses, making lasting connections, while teaching many topics.

What’s also special about these living-classroom spaces? There are things that react and respond to the learner, making them a living part of the environment, not just a witness. We see evidence every day of students learning new things. The difference is that students tend to retain

the information deeply, because of the connection and proximity to the subject matter.

So, why aren’t outdoor classrooms, gardens, spaces, and nooks in every school across the country? Well, there are more schools these days creating outdoor learning spaces on their campus. But for some the barriers and challenges in implementing these ‘new and unfamiliar’ projects seems daunting.

Over the next few issues of this newsletter, I will showcase some of the great school initiatives that some of Tremont’s schools are doing at home to support hands-on outdoor learning and extend Tremont’s impact.

Their collective vision, drive, and dedication have been inspiring to our staff and worthy of sharing.

## Spotlighting—Gresham Middle School, Knoxville, TN

Tremont Stats: Teachers have attended multiple teacher workshops. Students have not come to Tremont yet, but are working on coming next year for a day trip followed



AMELIA ADAMS

***“It is my hope that we, as a school community, help design a school system that recognizes learning is natural, that a love of learning is normal, and that real learning is passionate learning. That together we can open for our students a school curriculum that values questions above answers... creativity above fact... individuality above conformity, and excellence above standardized performance.”***

—Donna Parker, Gresham Middle School principal

up by a three-day trip in the spring. Their future goal is to bring 6th, 7th, and 8th graders each year. We are excited to work with them!

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Tremont's Impact on Schools

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Someone who immediately inspired me from Gresham Middle School was Donna Parker, the school’s principal. When I spoke with her in late 2011, she explained to me with such passion, her vision for the school.

“I want to transform our school into a place where students are really excited about learning and excited about coming to school,” she said. She went on to talk about some of the green initiatives at her school as well as projects she envisions for the future. Her vision and approach to education struck me as innovative, insightful, and open-minded.

One initiative was her vision to eventually have all grade levels at her school visit Tremont. As a former classroom teacher, I was excited to hear an administrator so aware of the benefits hands-on science-based education can offer students. Her interest in supporting educational field trips each year for all grades that would build off of the lessons from the previous year seemed so in line with our educational goals here at Tremont. A hands-on academic field experience that is embedded in the curriculum, spiraling up from each grade level, is ideal for building on the student's knowledge, allowing for deeper connections that last a lifetime.

Donna invited Tremont to come speak during a staff in-service day, and a few of us got to meet some of her science teachers, including Jill Lawrence and Amelia Adams. Both teachers were not only excited to talk more about getting out to Tremont, but also wanted to showcase some of the great initiatives they had been doing at their school.

Amelia showed me one of Gresham’s outdoor spaces where students could learn, eat lunch or do projects in sort of an intentional outdoor courtyard. I also got to walk through their outdoor classroom that was equipped with a compost station, a platform and benches for conducting lessons outside the classroom, and garden spaces with



outdoor art. Amelia spoke to me about some of the goals as well as the challenges of the spaces. She seemed dedicated to increasing her school's involvement in any sort of space that would encourage her students to think more critically, enjoy the learning process more, and have opportunities to engage in hands-on project-based activities.

When I followed up with Amelia later in the year, she spoke in more depth about how these initiatives began. She replied, “This year Gresham Middle School experimented with a course aimed at building relationships, teamwork, and problem solving with a group of students who were struggling to make the transition from elementary to middle school.

"Students experimented with designing and planning their garden space, creating ‘norms’ and ‘expectations’ for behavior in the outdoor space, and after planning their projects they implemented their plantings using donations from teachers and community organizations.”

Amelia mentioned that Tracy Gallant, another teacher at Gresham, taught this course and used a project-based approach that could connect with the students on a personal level.

She also said that the outdoor classroom is used a lot by the “Gresham Green Team,” a school club, and from time to time by various teachers throughout the year.

Amelia has seen reading teachers take their classes outside to read on nice days. She tries to encourage more teachers to use the space.

She has committed to using the space with her kids throughout the year for things including “calculating the mass, velocity, speed, acceleration,

force, and work of pumpkins being rolled down a hill and dropped from a ladder, naturalist journaling and illustration relating to the anatomy of flowers, as well as several different ‘scavenger hunts’ on different types of rocks or osmosis and diffusion.”

She worries that other teachers have either not quite

School Groups at Tremont During 2011-2012 School Year

Eighty elementary, middle, and high schools from 12 states brought students to Tremont during the 2011-12 school year. We look forward to seeing many of these schools during the 2012-13 school year. If your school is not listed, contact us for more information on how your students can live and learn in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

<i>A. M. Yealey Elementary School</i> Florence, KY	<i>Christian Academy of Knoxville</i> Knoxville, TN	<i>Hume-Fogg Academic High School</i> Nashville, TN	<i>Morristown West High School</i> Morristown, TN	<i>Rockwood School District</i> Eureka, MO	<i>Station Camp Middle School</i> Gallatin, TN
<i>Akiva School</i> Nashville, TN	<i>Concord Christian School</i> Knoxville, TN	<i>Immaculate Conception Cathedral High School</i> Memphis, TN	<i>New Horizon Montessori School</i> Louisville, TN	<i>Saint Anne Catholic School</i> Bristol, VA	<i>Sycamore School</i> Indianapolis, IN
<i>Bernheim Middle School</i> Shepherdsville, KY	<i>Cornerstone School</i> Ocala, FL	<i>Jones Valley Elementary</i> Huntsville, AL	<i>Norris Middle School</i> Norris, TN	<i>Sayre School</i> Lexington, KY	<i>Tate’s School of Discovery</i> Knoxville, TN
<i>Berrien County Math &amp; Science Center</i> Berrien Springs, MI	<i>Eagleton Elementary</i> Maryville, TN	<i>Knox Doss Middle School at Drake’s Creek</i> Hendersonville, TN	<i>Norwood High School</i> Cincinnati, OH	<i>Scottsboro City Gifted Program</i> Scottsboro, AL	<i>Trinity Christian School</i> Apopka, FL
<i>Berry College Middle School</i> Mount Berry, GA	<i>Eagleton Middle School</i> Maryville, TN	<i>Lebanon Special School District</i> Lebanon, TN	<i>Oak Hill School</i> Nashville, TN	<i>Seymour Community Christian School</i> Seymour, TN	<i>Union Grove Elementary School</i> Friendsville, TN
<i>Boyd Christian School</i> McMinnville, TN	<i>East Hardin Middle School</i> Glendale, KY	<i>Lenoir City Middle School</i> Lenoir City, TN	<i>Oak Mountain Academy</i> Carrollton, GA	<i>Shelbyville Middle School</i> Shelbyville, IN	<i>Walland Elementary School</i> Walland, TN
<i>Bruno Montessori</i> Birmingham, AL	<i>Episcopal School of Knoxville</i> Knoxville, TN	<i>Macdonald Intermediate School</i> Fort Knox, KY	<i>Old Trail School</i> Bath, OH	<i>Spring City Middle School</i> Spring City, TN	<i>Weatherly Heights Elementary</i> Huntsville, AL
<i>Burlington Elementary</i> Burlington, KY	<i>Etowah City Schools</i> Etowah, TN	<i>Maplewood Richmond Heights Middle School</i> Saint Louis, MO	<i>Oliver Springs Elementary</i> Oliver Springs, TN	<i>St. Louis Homeschool Group</i> Manchester, MO	<i>West End Middle School</i> Nashville, TN
<i>Calvin Donaldson Environmental Science Academy</i> Chattanooga, TN	<i>Faith Christian School</i> Summerville, SC	<i>Mason County Middle School</i> Maysville, KY	<i>Paideia Academy</i> Knoxville, TN	<i>St. Luke’s Episcopal School</i> Mobile, AL	<i>West High School</i> Knoxville, TN
<i>Carter High School</i> Strawberry Plains, TN	<i>Grace Christian Academy</i> Knoxville, TN	<i>McDowell Early College</i> Marion, NC	<i>Pi Beta Phi Elementary School</i> Gatlinburg, TN	<i>St. Mary of the Lake School</i> New Buffalo, MI	<i>Winton Woods High School</i> Cincinnati, OH
<i>Cedar Springs Homeschool Group</i> Knoxville, TN	<i>Hazelwood West Middle School</i> Hazelwood, MO	<i>McFadden School of Excellence</i> Murfreesboro, TN	<i>Rainbow Mountain Children’s School</i> Asheville, NC	<i>St. Paul Lutheran School</i> Peachtree City, GA	<i>Woodlawn School</i> Davidson, NC
<i>Cherokee Bend Elementary School</i> Birmingham, AL	<i>Hewitt-Trussville High School</i> Trussville, AL	<i>Merrol Hyde Magnet School</i> Hendersonville, TN	<i>Randolph School</i> Huntsville, AL	<i>Stanley Switlik Elementary School</i> Marathon, FL	<i>Woods Charter School</i> Chapel Hill, NC
<i>Cherokee Middle School</i> Kingston, TN	<i>Holy Comforter Episcopal School</i> Tallahassee, FL	<i>Montessori Academy</i> Mishawaka, IN	<i>Robertsville Middle School</i> Oak Ridge, TN		<i>Woodward Academy</i> Atlanta, GA
<i>Christ Presbyterian Academy</i> Nashville, TN			<i>Rockford Elementary School</i> Rockford, TN		<i>Wydown Middle School</i> Saint Louis, MO



PHOTOS BY JENNIE MCGUGAN



MICHAELA PRUITT

Special note: Teachers who attend any of these classes come free with their school as well as receive a discount that applies to all of their students attending Tremont during one of our school programs!

Upcoming Teacher Professional Development

<b>Teacher Escape Weekends</b> <i>September 8-9</i> <i>October 6-7</i>	<b>Educators' Workshop: Climate Change in the Smokies</b> <i>November 2-4</i>
<b>Southern Appalachian Ecology*</b> <i>September 21-23</i>	<b>Mammals*</b> <i>November 2-4</i>
<b>Advanced Naturalist Field Skills*</b> <i>September 21-23</i>	<i>*Part of our Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification Program. For more information, visit <a href="http://www.gsm.it.org">www.gsm.it.org</a></i>



# A Revealing Saunter

By Caleb Carlton, teacher/naturalist

Seeking out a black bear at the tail of a May evening...

I thought of nothing but the encounter. I saw nothing but the silhouettes of what the Cherokee called 'gv-ni-ge-yo-na.' I heard nothing but the possibility of bear paws atop leaves or fallen branches. My entire reality, along the first five minutes of trail, was a mental construct of the bear that might be.

In the midst of hunting down my experience, the naturalist within boiled to the forefront of my awareness and scolded my folly. Even a mediocre naturalist understands that almost never does one find what one seeks in nature. Instead, the true gifts of walking with the natural world are the unexpected encounters. I decided then, while walking the wild footway, to remain open and aware to all that might transpire.

This shift in awareness instantly opened my eyes to the golden glow of broad leaves, a cluster of inconspicuous mushrooms

growing forth from a decaying log, the sweet, garlic-like scent of Galax, the humid kiss of the air on my neck. My senses had suddenly soaked in all that I was actually encountering, and I felt all the richer for it.

Minutes beyond this realization of awareness, in the silent cradle of the mountainside, a Pileated Woodpecker cut through the radiant light nearly close enough to stroke. Wings spread and locked, head tucked and pointed, lipstick-red crest of feathers trailing behind a narrow beak, this beautiful bird swept across the panorama until a dense patch of young eastern hemlocks finally gave haven to the exposed dusk dweller.

Though only a momentary encounter, I immediately recognized that the grace of the woodpecker would glide onward within my

mind for decades yet to come. The precarious swoop formed a softness within me, an emotional response to independent stimuli that is hard to come by in the rigidity of the modern daily schedule.

Consequently, grace, in an increasingly hustled reality, is becoming a new sort of rare element that ought not be squandered when encountered. And maybe that's why kids need experiences like the ones that Tremont affords; the opportunity to experience revelatory emotion fostered by something other than the creations of a fellow human.

A little further along in my dance with dusk, I approached a finger-ridge protruding from the rest of the mountainside, oriented roughly east-west on a west-facing slope, so that any good sitting spot is a fine vantage point for sunset. I perched atop a weathered boulder to soak in the sinking of the sun below the western front.

As I sat and recounted the grace of the arbor-harbored avian, I experienced a new avenue of grace along which I had never before traveled. What began as absent gazing in the direction of the boulders beneath abruptly transformed into a time-traveling transcendent journey that pulled my mind back to the very beginnings of Appalachian

mountain building some 500-800 million years ago, before throttling me forward, past the present, and into the distant future time when, undoubtedly, the Smoky Mountains will have weathered and eroded to the point that mountains they will no longer be.

I have taught the geologic timeline of the Smoky Mountains many times over, and have frequently found myself in awe of the enormity of their impermanence, but this was the first time that my entire awareness seemed

to move back and forth along that same timeline.

I watched, as the boulder before me went through millions of years of uplift as a fluid piece of bedrock, rising thousands of feet above sea level. I watched as the same boulder eventually broke away from the rest of the mountainside and meandered downward with gravity. I watched as the exposed boulder weathered and eroded with the millennia, undone by wind, rain, lichen and moss—except I saw it unfold at an incredibly accelerated rate.

The boulder melted away, fluid in nature as the frothing sea. It dissipated into grains that were transported down the mountain and joined with the Middle Prong, flowing for the Gulf of Mexico. I watched the entire mountain range undergo the same fate. The mountains melted away, having risen and fallen in the blink of an eye—nothing more than a brief, upward pulse of the enduring Earth when seen from the long view.

And then I returned to my place atop the rock, the sun still lingering just above the western range. The experience, like all earthly configurations must do, had dissipated into an unfathomable thinness. Yet the time-skipping ride of that evening remains in my mind as one of the most beautiful poems I've yet to know.

Perhaps children need places like



STACEY WHISTONE



AMY WILSON

*continued on page 8*

# The View From Maddron Bald

By Dawn Dextraze, teacher/naturalist

Sunlight reached out and warmed faces and hands, a welcomed sensation after hiking so many miles in the cold shadow of the mountains the previous day. Talk and laughter had abated very early that evening due to the chilly temperatures of the wet holler where we camped.

The members of our group took shelter in their tents and snuggled into down sleeping bags, even then, feet were numb. The sound of water rushing over rocks lulled us to sleep.

The next morning as we ascended the trail toward Maddron Bald, hats, gloves, coats and even long underwear were peeled off and talk and laughter resumed.

Gaps started to occur in the vegetation along the ridge and views of Cosby were afforded us. We continued on in the

close to our first waypoint of the day, Maddron Bald, when the trail started to level off.

The sand myrtle created tunnels that were about three feet tall allowing us to see the sky above; the narrowness of the path forced us to continue moving forward.

Small side trails into this dense vegetation called out to the adventurous spirit of the group, so we dropped our heavy packs on the main trail and followed the footpaths up to the left. The branches all around us seemed to grab at our clothes and hair, trying to pull us back to the main trail, nonetheless, we continued on.

We were rewarded with a view of the valley that we had been hiking in for the past day and a half, but we quickly realized that all of us would not be able to fit in the minute cul-de-sac at the top.

We took turns and when the whole team had enjoyed the view, we all rejoiced in the reality that we had made it to the point of interest for the day, Maddron Bald. We decided to stay for a short while to bask in the sunshine and refuel.

It would only be a matter of time before we would again be under the shadow of the spruce-fir forest, adventuring on.



PHOTOS BY DAWN DEXTRAZE



hopes that a grand view from Maddron Bald was awaiting.

As we climbed ever higher, we started to notice distinct changes in the plant community. Evergreen shrubs such as mountain laurel and Catawba rhododendron increased in number and even created tunnels over the trail, plunging us into darkness.

The trail snaked around the edge of the mountain and then onto the ridge where dense patches of reindeer lichen and sphagnum moss appeared. Branches from vertically challenged evergreens reached into the trail as if to shake our hands.

We heard chirps of birds and saw a ray of sunshine peaking out from around a corner. We knew we must be

*The “we” in this story are nine extraordinary women that spent a weekend in October 2011 backpacking in the Smokies with Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont.*

*If you are interested in experiencing the Smokies in this intimate way, we have women's backpack trips each fall. Come and join us, October 19-21! See page 15 for more information.*



# Autumn Reflections

By Debora Blind, artist in residence

The leaves are falling in swirls around my sketchbook as I look out over my backyard, and try to capture the shape and colors of a maple leaf lying nearby.

As I draw the contour lines, my mind wanders back to a few weeks ago when the foliage being drawn was a

vibrant green instead of gold or red. The light falling around me had a warm, yellow feel instead of a cool, weaker golden touch. And, I was at Tremont in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, instead of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Laying the pencil down, I allow the memories of working as a visual artist-in-residence to come to the forefront of my thoughts, and I take a few stolen moments to try to recapture those wonderful days of June and July.

I think about working side-by-side with the marvelous staff at Tremont, leading nature clubs, working on nature drawing with various hiking groups, or watching teenagers going through an evening of square dancing moves.

I also remember many hours spent wandering off on my own to complete oil paint landscapes at Cades Cove or in Walker Valley. These wonderful carefree hours

resulted not only in finished work, but also in memories of the vitality of nature.

The challenge of trying to capture the “portrait” of a large crayfish nicknamed “Goliath” still brings a smile to my artistic self. And nowhere on earth have I experienced

the peace that can permeate the soul like the tranquility granted by resting beside the Middle Prong...feet dangling in the sparkling water.

The privilege of living and working at Tremont will continue to enrich my life. I look forward to the future, when other visits will allow me the opportunity

to improve my art, and explore the wonderful connections between the arts and sciences.

But, at least for the time being, I’ll pick up my pencil... and continue the drawing that started the thought-provoking retreat back to those delightful summer days.

*Tremont is very fortunate to have Deborah Blind, a high school art teacher from Ohio join us each summer as artist-in-residence. In this article, she reflects on her experiences in Great Smoky Mountains National Park during those summers.*

## A Revealing Saunter

continued from page 6

Tremont for such experiences, a learning context in which their imaginations are encouraged to sweep them beyond the thin of the everyday fathomable and into the thick of the immense journey.

When the evening expired and my walking had ceased, no black bear had

been encountered. Instead, experiences unique to my twenty-seven years had weaved through me. I emerged from the forest that night with a different line of sight for looking upon the past, the future, even the reality of nature.

And that, I propose, is why the young need nature and someone to explore it with. Children are sponges for experience, and whatever it is that they soak up, those

experiences become their basis for seeking out the world for the duration of life.

What the world needs are humans willing to take that long view, to fully embrace that immense journey, to well up with that precious and rare grace when it’s needed.

Indeed, what the world seems to need from humans, it will readily gift to them if only the two are allowed to walk hand-in-hand.



TIM BOWERMAN

# Summertime and the Learning Is Easy...and Fun!

Insects were collected, salamanders were monitored, waterfalls were seen, hikes were taken through the wilderness, old-growth forests were investigated, field experiments were set up all over the place, mountains were climbed, and cooling off with lots of splashing and laughter at the swimming hole was the order of the day.

This and more took place this summer at Tremont. And, with all of it, kids were learning—learning about the national park, the trees, the animals, the plants, the culture of the mountains, and about themselves.

Summer at Tremont is like summer nowhere else. Someone once said a picture is worth a thousand words, so we thought we’d share a few of them from this summer’s exploits.

Wish you were here? No problem. Living and learning in the park doesn’t stop when summer ends. Tremont’s environmental education programs are year-round. Check out our program guide online at [gsmit.org](http://gsmit.org). And plan to visit soon.

Tremont... not just for summer, but year round learning and fun in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



Above: Birdbanding—just one of the scientific research projects Tremont participants assist the national park in conducting.

Left: Science + national park + girls = learning and growing. (Girls in Science Camp)



Above: Summer campers show off their creative side with masks they made themselves (Discovery Camp)

Left: Who says teachers can’t learn and have fun at the same time? (Smoky Mountains Science Teacher Institute)



PHOTOS BY WARREN BIELENBERG (TOP) AND KATHLEEN DIRKEN



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Tremont's Impact on Schools

continued from page 4

“bought into the outdoor space as a valuable school resource,” or that initiatives like the new Tennessee TEAM model of evaluation “inadvertently discourages teachers from taking students places during class time.”

She said that, “with the TEAM rubric, with so much importance on behavior and classroom management, some teachers are fearful that students’ behavior in an environment outside of the classroom might be less than the TEAM rubric desires.”

Amelia contends that so much is being expected of teachers these days that many teachers feel that utilizing an outdoor space is just one more unrealistic expectation or task to complete, rather than seeing the benefits that may accumulate from allowing students to venture outside to learn.

Currently Gresham is in the process of working with Tremont to schedule educational field trips this coming year, where the lessons and standards they are learning in the classroom will be directly tied to their experience at Tremont.

Amelia is also interested in implementing a lichen-monitoring project at school, after attending an intense lichen workshop at Tremont. She envisions implementing this citizen science

project in her classroom, which would produce data that students would bring with them to Tremont to compare to data collected in Tremont’s lichen monitoring project.

Amelia says, “Many of our students—despite being just over an hour away—have never been to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I look forward to showing this grand playground to students for the first time. Inquiry-based outdoor learning will help encourage student’s natural instincts of curiosity and exploration—things that many teachers complain are lacking from students today.”

I commend Amelia on the energy she has committed to improving her teaching skills, the dedication she has shown toward her students’ growth and development, and her continual interest in learning to teach science in new and innovative ways. I look forward to building Tremont’s relationship with Gresham Middle School and seeing Gresham students here in 2013!

Stay tuned to the next installment of this 4-part series showcasing teachers who are connecting students with nature in their own schoolyard and classroom.

Autumn's Backyard

A school trip to Tremont is hiking, salamander monitoring, campfires, and much more. The activity is nearly constant. But a few minutes spent alone in the woods can become a highlight of the week.

During a “solo sit,” each student finds a special spot and spends a few minutes soaking up the mountains. It’s a chance to listen to the sounds of nature without interruption, to look closely at details, and to just relax and reflect.

It’s also a chance to sketch or journal, and some exceptional pieces of creative work often result. During one such “sit,” Weatherly Heights Elementary School (Huntsville, AL) student, Chanda Shaw, wrote a poem that shows her sensory experience of fall. Here it is for you to enjoy.

Autumn’s Backyard

As I walk through the Smokies,  
Cold icy wind blowing across my cheek,  
Blue Jay cawing,  
I gaze at the trees dipping their leaves  
Into paints of red, orange, and yellow.

I hear the thumping  
Of the river’s cold water  
Gushing, pushing against the stones  
Buried within the river’s bed.

Curling a dead leaf in my fist,  
I lift it to my nose  
Breathing in, feeling the rush  
Of its musky and minty fragrance.

The trail beneath my feet leads me  
Sometimes letting coarse bark brush my fingers,  
Sometimes letting me feel the soft ferns.  
Yes! I have arrived in Autumn’s backyard.

What's Your Story?

Did you visit Tremont as a child? Maybe you came with a school group, spent a summer at camp or worked as a teacher/naturalist one season. We want to hear from you. Did your Tremont experience inspire you to work in environmental education? Have you shared the wonders of the Smokies with others after discovering it for yourself at Tremont? Email heather@gsmiit.org and share your story.

Citizen Science Research & Other Volunteers

From 1/1/12 to 6/30/12:

John Adams
Marci Aldridge
Sandra Aldridge
Kara Arbes
Stacey Arbes
Neil Arp
Cindy Beal
Emily Beard
Nathaniel Behl
Esther Bell
Emery Benson
Carla Bielstein
Janet Bigelow
Tim Bigelow
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Mallory Davis
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With a bequest to Tremont, you are making a very special gift. Options for doing so include cash bequests, gifts of property, gifts of life insurance, gifts of securities, a share of the residue of your estate, or the remainder of a trust.

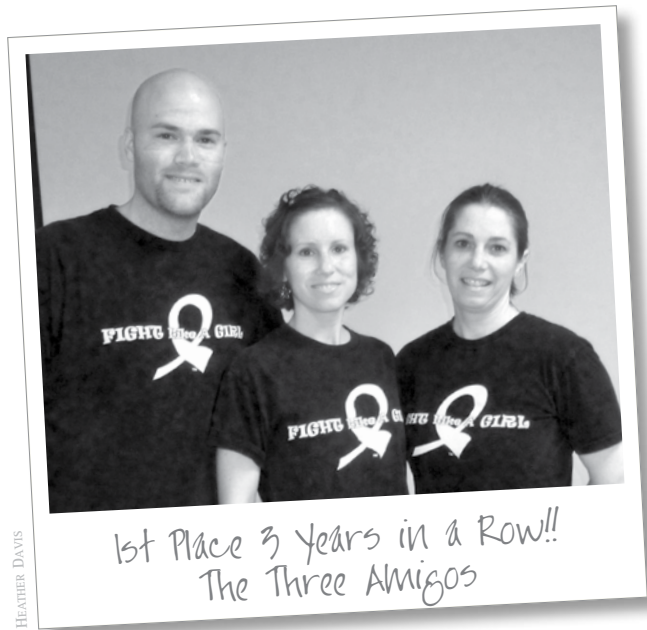
If you have included a bequest to Tremont in your will or in a codicil to your will, please let us know so we can thank you.

If you have not yet made such a gift and would like more information about how you can leave a legacy to Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont, please call Sandi Byrd at (865) 448-6709 or send an e-mail to Sandi@gsmiit.org.



# 2012 Smoky Mountains Scavenger Hunt

By Heather Davis, marketing communications specialist



**S**aturday, March 24th, 120 adventurous competitors were all over Great Smoky Mountains National Park participating in Tremont's 5th annual Smokies Scavenger Hunt.

The goal was to answer 75 questions about everything from naturalist skills to park history in a 24-hour period. In the end, The 3 Amigos team came in first for the third year in a row, The Karate Queens + 1 Beast came in second, and Mario Andretti's Passengers were third.

Funds raised by this event go to the Tremont Scholarship Fund. Visit <http://www.gsmi.org/hunt.html> for final score listing.

This event would not be possible without support from our local sponsors. Please share your appreciation with them next time you visit them.



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## Go Forth & Get Dirty!

continued from page 1

I learned a million things: rocks are hard, crayfish in a jar overnight die, wet red clay is slippery, water snakes usually bite when grabbed (brown snakes don't), and how to climb trees or balance on a log.\*

As a result, I felt a kinship with the land. I felt a sense of ownership and belonging—so much so that when 'my woods' were eventually leveled for a church and a parking lot, I was angry and hurt, as if a part of my identity was gone.

Recently, I was leading an activity with hundreds of kids teaching about watersheds at a local water festival, and I couldn't help notice that (a) the kids were out of their element just sitting on the ground, and (b) they were having a ball!

My lesson plan included a wrap-

up that encouraged water conservation, but by the end of the activity, it was clear that something else was needed. I heard myself telling these kids to go out and dam up creeks, get



KATHLEEN DUBIN (BOTTOM) AND DAWN DEXTRAZE (TOP)

dirty, look under rocks, and build forts.

How can we expect kids to protect and conserve a land for which they have no connection? Before they can

protect it, they have to know it. As adults who love kids and the natural world, we need to get them out in it, and to be open to the fact that they need to be kids, break things, and yes, occasionally kill stuff.

At Tremont, we will continue to conduct educational programs and do our part to protect this magical park, but we need everyone making it okay for kids to be kids.

As Robert Michael Pyle wrote in his essay *Eden in a Vacant Lot* (2002), "For special places to work their magic on kids, they need to be able to do some clamber and damage... [they need] little patches that are not manicured, planted, controlled, or protected, but are close to home and available for kids to play, as they please."

*\*These are the kinds of things that, in years past, most kids learned just by growing up. No one had to teach them.*

# Junior High Fireflies

By Ian Lupey, summer teacher/naturalist

I carefully climb into my hammock strung between a muscledwood and a hemlock above the creek between Spruce-Flats Falls and the Middle Prong. My senses come alive as I settle into my cocoon-like bed... a gentle breeze carries the aroma of a newly blossomed laurel flower. My hearing goes undisturbed from the flowing of the water falling from the rocks into the pool below, aerating the environment for many different aquatic species.

Dusk has settled in and the crepuscular feeders that enjoy this dim world scurry about. Birds settle in for the night as bats take to the sky. The thought of bear creeps through my mind as the breeze from the falls penetrates my cocoon. Just as the thought comes to me, I see it.

Not a bear, but something soothing; making me forget about my worries. One, then ten, then fifty fireflies begin their evening rituals. As their bioluminescent abdomens find the rhythm of the woods, I am taken to a place of pure serenity.

Not only synchronizing with each other, I notice these fireflies are now in rhythm with the falls. The breeze pushes my hammock in time, as the

flying suitors dance in the sky. As darkness falls, the white water of the falls makes for an amazing backdrop to the insects that are searching for that perfect mate.

I am reminded of the junior high dance when that first slow song



STEVE ZIGLER

comes on. The boys prudently find a girl to show off to. A place where innocence reigns and the rush of love flows. This place, nighttime at Spruce-Flats Falls, is just that. An innocent, natural, and forever new place—one that will remain not only in my memory, but in my heart just like that first junior high dance.



# Another Great Day on the Farm

By Sandi Byrd, director of development & public relations

Sunday, June 3rd, friends and supporters of Tremont gathered at Marblegate Farm in Friendsville, TN, the private home and farm of Bill and Donna Cobble.

Weather for this second annual event was perfect and the farm-to-table gourmet meal prepared by Holly Hambright and her staff was delicious. The live auction conducted by Sam Furrow included, among other things, a trip to South Africa, a week at the new Roosevelt Lodge near Gatlinburg, and a stay at the Wort Hotel in Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

Tremont Board President, Cathy Ackermann, welcomed attendees, and Jim Haslam, also a board member, introduced the guest speaker, Senator Bob Corker, who spoke briefly. Senator Corker applauded Tremont's efforts to get kids outdoors and learning about nature.



The audience was also entertained by none-other than Teddy Roosevelt, who shared stories of his days in the White House and his tireless efforts to establish public lands. Teddy is actually Joe Wiegand, a world renowned reprisor of our 26th President.

The event raised \$118,000. Net proceeds will benefit Tremont's endowment fund.



## Looking Ahead

Visit [www.gsmit.org](http://www.gsmit.org), call 865-448-6709, or e-mail [mail@gsmit.org](mailto:mail@gsmit.org) for more information on any of our offerings!

### SEPTEMBER

#### Teacher Escape Weekend

September 8-9

A one-night escape for teachers allowing you to meet other teachers, share ideas, learn about new Tremont programs, and get answers to questions before bringing your students to Tremont. Relax, enjoy the mountain scenery, and make new friends, while enhancing your environmental education skills. Reduces the cost of your trip to Tremont for each of your students.

Cost: \$50 non-refundable registration fee.

#### SANCP\*—Southern Appalachian Ecology

September 21-23

This course provides an overview of the unique ecology of aquatic systems of the southern Appalachian Mountains particularly as it relates to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, through discussion and field trips. Topics will include aquatic macroinvertebrates, habitats, conservation issues, etc.

Cost: \$302 per person.

#### SANCP\* Advanced—Advanced Naturalist Field Skills

September 21-23

Join Ken Voorhis for this weekend designed to push your naturalist skills to the limit. Explore the meaning of natural history, and be introduced to new content areas in this largely field-based course. Expect to hike, journal, interpret, and discover. You will also conduct an in-depth species profile and presentation.

Cost: \$302

### OCTOBER

#### Teacher Escape Weekend

October 6-7

A one-night escape for teachers allowing you to meet other teachers, share ideas, learn about new Tremont programs, and get answers to questions before bringing your students to Tremont. Relax, enjoy the mountain scenery, and make new friends, while enhancing your environmental education skills. Also reduces the cost of your trip to Tremont for each of your students.

Cost: \$50 non-refundable registration fee.

#### Fall Hiking Road Scholar

October 7-12

Explore these ancient mountains with daily hikes through breathtaking scenery while watching the spectacular colors progress through the week. Hikes will be 5-13 miles making the program strenuous. The evenings, however, are relaxed, followed by Appalachian music and tales, programs on mountain wildlife, or stories around the campfire. Find more information and registration at [www.roadscholar.org](http://www.roadscholar.org).

Cost: \$575 per person.

#### Women's Fall Backpack

October 19-21

Experience the glory of autumn in the Great Smoky Mountains on a three-day backpacking adventure. You bring your sleeping bag and we'll provide all the information, food, and gear for your excursion. Participants must be in good physical condition and be able to hike 5-8 miles a day in rugged terrain.

Cost: \$308 per person.

#### Autumn Brilliance Photography Workshop

October 19-22

Spend a weekend with photographer Willard Clay as he shares the splendors of fall in the Smokies. Field sessions and lectures designed for intermediate to professional photographers will cover the use of light, composition, landscape photography, close-ups, and how to find the "right" picture.

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

### NOVEMBER

#### Educators' Workshop: Climate Change in the Smokies

November 2-4

Using Great Smoky Mountains National Park as your classroom, learn how to bring climate change to life for your students. Join Tremont staff and GSMNP rangers and scientists in learning the current state of climate change in the park.

Cost: \$255. Available to middle and high school teachers for a \$50 non-refundable registration fee.

#### SANCP\*—Mammals

November 2-4

Explore the diversity of mammal species in the southern Appalachian Mountains with a focus on the management practices used within Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Emphasis will be given to general natural history of each species, including but not limited to: distribution, associations, reproduction, status, conservation, research methods, etc.

Cost: \$302 per person.

\*Southern Appalachian Naturalist Certification Program


# Homecoming

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Caleb Carlton  
Dawn Dextraze  
Kathleen Durkin  
Gina Lappe  
Patrick McNamara  
John Rakes

### summer teacher/ naturalists

Colin Brumsted  
Dena Cohen-Copeland  
Ian Lupey  
Amy Wilson

### environmental education summer interns

Simon Carbone  
Paige Tester  
Branden Watts

### citizen science research interns

Trevor Kennard  
Andrew O'Neil  
Clara Ross

### citizen science educator

Elizabeth Davis

### citizen science coordinator

Tiffany Beachy

### school program coordinator

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### special program coordinator

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