



Engaging Youth in Parks

Centennial Challenge at Acadia

In 2016, America's National Park Service will mark its hundred-year anniversary. While this is indeed cause for celebration, it is also time to reevaluate what these parks mean to the nation as a whole. When the United States government first established the National Park Service in 1916, it sought to protect the nation's natural and cultural places. Now, more than ninety years later, park preservation goals have remained the same while the environmental landscape has undergone dramatic changes.

In an effort to invigorate national parks and keep them sustainable into the 21st century, the federal government recently allocated \$50 million in matching federal funds to help each park meet its own "Centennial Challenge." National parks have been using that money for many projects, including trail development, habitat restoration, and wildlife protection. With \$181,640 in contributions from Eastern National, Acadia Partners for Science and Learning, and Friends of Acadia, Acadia National Park qualified for a federal matching grant of \$181,000 and launched its own project in the summer of 2008, titled "Centennial Challenge: Engaging Youth."

Drawing on studies indicating that today's children are spending less and less time outdoors than children of previous generations, officials at Acadia



realized that, absent intervention, there might be no one left to care for the earth in a few decades. They reasoned that without an intrinsic connection to nature, these children could neither develop a love of the outdoors nor generate the passion needed to protect and preserve the world's wild and beautiful places.

But it's not too late. And Acadia has emerged as a leader in what has become a national movement to get kids back outdoors. In 2008, Acadia "engaged youth" through a range of outdoor programs, including:

- free Junior Ranger books
- more park activities for children
- teacher workshops to link educators with the parks
- blogs written by educators and student interns in the park
- employment opportunities for high school and college students
- financial aid for classes to attend the Schoodic Education Adventure

- special family park events in the spring, summer, and fall

There is, however, much more work to be done, and the staff at Acadia is already looking ahead. Currently Acadia's Junior Ranger program reaches both families visiting the park and local third-grade classes. In 2009, Acadia will launch a statewide Junior Ranger effort to reach every third-grader in the state of Maine.

That goal squares with Acadia's ultimate goal for 2016. Specifically, says Acadia Chief Interpreter Deb Wade, the goal is that in less than ten years every graduating high school senior in Maine will have had their own national park experience. That sort of exposure, say park staff like Wade and Superintendent Sheridan Steele, will plant the seeds of stewardship necessary to sustain not just the national parks but all of the earth's lands and waterways.

NPS Websites

www.nps.gov/acad

The official website of Acadia National Park. Includes information on park resources, trip planning, and more

www.nps.gov/acad/forteachers

The home of Acadia National Park's education program, including links to the Teacher-Ranger-Teacher program; teacher, parent, and student resources; the Junior Ranger program; and more

www.nps.gov/learn

National Park Service curriculum-based learning tools, teaching resources, and online activities

www.nps.gov/webrangers

The spot for kids of all ages to become a virtual ranger



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Acadia National Park protects more than 47,000 acres of granite-domed mountains, woodlands, lakes and ponds, and ocean shoreline, creating striking scenery and diverse habitats. This diverse environment combines with a rich cultural history to create unparalleled scientific, educational, and recreational opportunities in a spectacular setting.

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The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Time in a Muddy Pond Connects Kids to Nature

Through jingles and time in a muddy pond, kids participating in Ranger Kate Petrie's "By the Pond" program learned about everything from the noises frogs make to why herons have a hard time swallowing big things. (Green frogs sound like plucked banjo strings, and baby herons' narrow throats require parent birds to chew up food for their young.) The four- to seven-year-olds in the program also learned principles of ecological conservation and identification of various water critters.

Summer children's programs like "By the Pond" are a relatively new option in the National Park Service. That is, while national parks have been around since the late 1800s, programming targeting kids only began in earnest over the last few decades. Acadia National Park first launched kid-centered programs in the 1970s and has been increasing its offerings ever since. For example, while Acadia offered only a handful of kids programs in 1998, it offered about a hundred programs in 2008.

Unlike traditional teaching formats that tend to emphasize book learning,

these programs enable kids to immerse themselves in the outdoors and learn about natural and cultural phenomenon through touch, sound, and other senses. Programs like "By the Pond" help reinforce concepts, such as tree and insect identification, through general good fun.

Ranger Todd Miller, who also leads kids programs at the park, remarks that kids today spend countless hours playing computer games or getting shuttled around from one activity to the next. "[They] don't have time for observation, contemplation and imagination," he says. "It's a part of who we are as human beings that's atrophying."

Even though kids at Acadia might have a hard time expressing what makes nature so cool, they love that getting dirty is part of the game. "I need to wring out my sock!" exclaims 6-year-old Arenal, of Baltimore, Maryland, after fording a stream during "By the Pond." To her credit, it wasn't Arenal who fell into the water but her mom.



Kids exploring nature through summer children's programs. NPS/Karen Lanier

Dream Job for Teens: Why Working for the National Park Service Beats Flipping Burgers

Most jobs for teens entail flipping burgers or bagging groceries. But area high school students Wills DeLaittre, 16, and Tarryn Rourk, 17, spent their summer doing something many adults dream about: working as park rangers. Five days a week and six hours a day, DeLaittre and Rourk donned the National Park Service uniform and stood behind Acadia National Park's typically packed visitor center desk answering questions, orienting visitors, and, in the process, learning a thing or two about their local national park.

Although the hubbub surrounding getting kids back outdoors is a relatively new phenomenon, Acadia National Park administrators realized the benefits of employing area youth when they launched the program almost twenty years ago. Not only does it help park officials connect to the larger community, but also it provides



High school students gain valuable work experience as seasonal park rangers

local high school students with real-life work experience.

Although both DeLaittre and Rourk spent much of their childhood poking around the park, they didn't quite realize how much there was to know. "My brain was racked after three days of training," DeLaittre says. DeLaittre's supervisor Betty Lyle acknowledges that while the work can be very intense, some youth hires have gone



on to pursue careers in the National Park Service. Even if students pursue a different career path, she adds, it provides them with strong public relations skills.

Working for the National Park Service, it seems, also helps students boost their confidence levels. "When people have questions, I just answer them," says a now fully trained DeLaittre. "I'm like the superhero for questions."

Plugged in ... to Nature

Generation Y. Millennials. Echo boomers. Net generation. These are just some of the terms used to describe anyone who came of age during the 1990s and 2000s. At least here in the United States, this cohort unites in one key way: technology. Put simply, no previous generation has been as plugged in or as technologically savvy as this one.

But many fear that these new technologies are widening the gap between Gen Y'ers and nature. Acadia National Park Superintendent Sheridan Steele disagrees. The key to tapping this cohort, he says, is not rejecting technology, but rather using new media platforms to highlight all that's great about the outdoors.

That belief has spurred Acadia to go high-tech. The park, for instance, recently

unveiled a new computer facility for the Schoodic Education Adventure, a residential program for students in grades 4–8. Mapping software enables students to explore the park with GPS units and then transfer GPS coordinates onto computers. The end result: a map detailing their day's explorations.

Plus, Acadia has been expanding its website offerings with interactive activities and first-person narratives. The park has received accolades for its "eCruise," a virtual tour showcasing the park's coastal setting, including life on nearby islands, crashing waves, majestic lighthouses, and the area's long and varied cultural history. And this summer kids were able to link to interns and seasonal rangers through blogs and "ranger minutes," or short video

clips featuring rangers talking about some aspect of the park.

Park staff have high expectations for next summer, too. Visitors can expect to see more ranger minutes, more blogs, and maybe even another "eTour." So please check out the park at www.nps.gov/acad.



Learning GPS skills

Schoodic Education and Research Center (SERC)

In 2002, Acadia National Park inherited a former Navy base on park land at the Schoodic Peninsula. The buildings there have been converted into the Schoodic Education and Research Center, which now houses some of Acadia's education programs, including teacher institutes and the Schoodic Education Adventure (SEA), a residential program for students in grades 4 to 8. The park also uses these facilities to host lectures by area professionals.

As far as learning environments go, the Schoodic Peninsula is hard to beat. More than 2,000 acres of the

Schoodic Peninsula is park land, providing visitors with a unique look at Maine's rugged coastline and its associated habitats. Moreover, the center comes outfitted with cutting-edge technology, such as equipment to broadcast lectures to remote audiences, a high-tech computer classroom, and a state-of-the-art auditorium.

And this year, with Centennial Challenge grant money, Acadia is providing scholarships to help participants in SEA and the teacher institutes defray travel and participation costs.



The SERC campus along the coast of Maine's Schoodic Peninsula. NPS/Stuart West

SEA Beckons

Few have forgotten the excitement of getting out of the classroom to go on a field trip. At SEA that field trip involves not a small half-day outing, but a three-day, two-night immersion experience at Acadia National Park. Students participating in SEA get to learn about everything from the rocks along Maine's rugged coastline to what kinds of creatures live in cold Atlantic waters to the prehistoric civilizations that inhabited this area.

SEA is conducted in a format that not only gets kids back outdoors—an experience many children no longer have in today's technology-driven, urban environments—but also teaches them about nature through hands-on, curriculum-based activities. Acadia also offers participants use of a state-of-the-art computer lab, full accommodations, and help from a host of qualified teaching assistants.



To participate in SEA, educators must attend a teachers' institute in advance of their students' visit to the park (see "Immersing Teachers in Acadia's Outdoor Classroom," page 5).

To learn more about SEA and associated scholarship opportunities, visit www.nps.gov/acad/forteachers/seaprogram.htm.



Photos by Friends of Acadia/Stephanie Clement (top) and NPS/Karen Lanier (bottom)

Teacher-Rangers Bring Parks to Students

While many school teachers dream about becoming a park ranger, few actually get to don the ranger hat. But four teachers did just that this summer at Acadia National Park.

As participants in the innovative Teacher-Ranger-Teacher (TRT) program, these individuals spent the summer leading interpretive programs, staffing Acadia's visitor center, shadowing park employees and researchers, and, of course, creating lesson plans. This fall, these teachers returned to the classroom armed with firsthand knowledge of the National

Park Service and, more importantly, how to share that knowledge with their students. During National Park Week in April, they will also wear their ranger uniform to school and present programs to introduce students and staff to the National Park Service.

One of Acadia's overarching goals with the TRT program is attracting teachers working with underserved youth. Consequently, many of the students in the teacher-rangers' school districts have never experienced a national park—or even nature—for themselves. This program, however,

enables teachers to provide kids with a national park experience inside the classroom.

This year marks Acadia's second year as a participant in the program. With help from the Centennial Challenge, Acadia increased the number of teacher-rangers from one in 2007 to four in 2008. Three of these teachers worked at Acadia, while the fourth spent his summer at Saint Croix Island International Historic Site outside of Calais, Maine. Acadia is proud to be the first park in the Northeast to have participated in this program.

To learn more about teacher-rangers, visit www.nps.gov/acad/forteachers/teacher-ranger-teacher.htm, or contact Cynthia Ocel, education coordinator, at 207-288-8822 or cynthia_ocel@nps.gov. The website link will direct you to downloadable application forms.

SERC, Continued: Immersing Teachers in Acadia's Outdoor Classroom

With the help of Ranger Kate Petrie, twelve teachers pondered deep questions, such as "What do you do when one endangered species eats another endangered species?" and tide pool-related riddles, such as "If you had to be a sea creature and I was your real estate agent, where would you purchase land?"

Petrie's program was one of four teacher institutes the park offered this summer at the Schoodic Education and Research Center. The goal of the institutes is to help participants incorporate scientific, cultural, and conservation concepts into their curriculum. Teachers participating in these institutes also become eligible to bring students to Schoodic in the fall through SEA.

For participants like John Nye, a 7th-grade science teacher from Maine, the institute provided an unparalleled opportunity to beef up his intertidal curriculum: "My ultimate goal is to see what kinds of resources are available here, and gain some new knowledge to bring back to the classroom because we [also] live on the coast."

To discover upcoming teacher workshops, visit the park website at www.nps.gov/acad/forteachers/professionaldevelopment.htm.



Special Events

Getting kids outdoors doesn't have to be hard—especially when activities, animals, and treasure hunts are involved. Through an expanded list of special events, Acadia National Park and one of its nonprofit partners, Friends of Acadia, hope to lure kids back into the wild the festive way. This year's special events included Junior Ranger Day, Family Fun Day, Acadia Quest, and Take Pride in Acadia Day. The park also offers a host of family-friendly volunteer opportunities to help kids and parents get involved in everything the park has to offer. To stay abreast of current offerings at the park, visit the park website at www.nps.gov/acad and click on the “support your park” link.

Cleaning up: Acadia Carriage Roads Get Winterized

More than 300 volunteers turned out for Acadia National Park's annual Take Pride in Acadia Day. On the first Saturday of every November, volunteers participating in Take Pride in Acadia help park staff rake out clogged ditches and culverts along the carriage roads to prepare for the region's notoriously soggy winter and spring seasons.

Without these efforts, says Acadia Volunteer Coordinator Jonathan

Gormley, leaf dams would build up and eventually cause flooding and erosion along the park's historic carriage roads. These historic roads, which were designed by John D. Rockefeller Jr. between 1913 and 1940, enable visitors and locals to enjoy the area's rugged beauty throughout the entire year, whether on bike, carriage, skis, or foot.

And this year, with the help of its nonprofit partner Friends of Acadia, the park was also able to unveil the



winners of the summer's first-ever Acadia Quest at the Take Pride in Acadia luncheon. Participants had to complete several activities, such as riding the Island Explorer bus, attending special events and ranger-led programs, and hiking or biking Acadia's many trails and roads. The only criterion for admission was that each team comprise a minimum of one adult and one child under age 18. Prizes included hiking, boating, and camping packages.

Fun in the Rain: Family Fun Day Draws Crowd Despite Clouds

Some 500 participants donned raincoats on Sunday, July 20, to celebrate the third annual Family Fun Day at the Nature Center at Sieur de Monts Spring. Co-sponsored by Acadia National Park and its nonprofit partner, Friends of Acadia, Family Fun Day is designed to introduce children and their parents to the many ways to recreate outdoors. The event also illustrates the types of jobs available through the National Park Service and other outdoor organizations.

This year's activities included everything from helping a young search dog learn his role to trail crew demonstrations and frog-finding at the Tarn. New activities this year included demonstrations of a “good” campsite and a “bad” one.

Attendance at the event has been steadily climbing since its inception three years ago. The first Family Fun Day drew about 300 participants; last year's count was just over 400. This year's record attendance surprised coordinators given the bad weather. Not that the kids seemed to mind soggy shoes. “This is like a rainforest,” remarked four-year-old George McBride of Washington, D.C., as he navigated his way through a “treasure hunt” in the Wild Gardens of Acadia next to the Nature Center.

Coordinators also distributed white pine saplings to participating families as a way of demonstrating stewardship principles. Family Fun Day represents one of the many ways Acadia is working to forge a relationship

between kids and the outdoors. The annual event is held the third Sunday of July.



Exploring trail crew duties. NPS/Todd Edgar