

WESTERN OUTDOOR NEWS

2008 WUF SUMMER CAMP

By: Jenna Copeland

Over a year ago The Wilderness Unlimited Foundation, W.U. and the Clarke Ranch set out to create a Youth Summer Camp that would stand true to the principles and standards that is W.U.

Youth, women and specialized hunting and fishing education programs have been the backbone of W.U. outreach for over 20 years, and the natural progression was to combine many of these elements into an action-packed Youth Summer camp.



It is easy to say that the first year of our Youth Summer Camp was an all around outstanding event for campers and volunteers alike. Camp began with 28 campers (18 W.U. members and 10 non-members), 12 volunteers, the Clarke Ranch owners and a handful of W.U. staff members.

After saying goodbye to cell phones, ipods, video games and, most importantly, parents, campers welcomed the Clarke Ranch as their new home for the next five days. Once assembled in their groups,

“Tent City” was constructed and everyone was able to settle in. The local critters were in for a rude awaking after a group of girls discovered the orange bellied newts that inhabit the creeks that run through camp. “I caught one!” Campers went running to see what they could find. Not only newts, but bullfrogs, toads and blue-bellied lizards kept campers scurrying with nets and lizard lassos in hand. Note: All the wildlife that were “caught” by the campers were identified and released unharmed under the supervision of camp counselors.

The first night’s dinner of spaghetti, green salad and garlic bread set the pace of amazing camp meals, thanks to our remarkable camp chef, Richard Ambrosino. For dessert, the kids made s’mores. Camping doesn’t get better than that!

As the campfire burned down and the sky turned dark, the stars began to shine through what was a smoky sky just the day before. Juiced on sugar and the excitement of being up past their bedtimes, campers and group leaders prepared for a night hike to the top of the ranch. The night sky was brilliant. Campers searched for constellations, pointed out orbiting satellites and “Oooo’d” and Awww’d” at shooting stars. It was very apparent that all were happy to trade the city lights for new ones they had found.

During the days at camp numerous activities occurred. Campers, with Alpen Optic binoculars in hand, were led on hikes

where they learned about wildlife and nature. The Clarke Ranch owners led one such hike. Thanks to our resident wildlife biologist, Matt Norton, campers were given the opportunity to learn not only the common names of animals but also their scientific ones.



The lake provided bountiful power bait hungry fish. Many campers caught their very first fish! Wes Tamson provided fly fishing lessons for those campers that wanted to extend their fishing knowledge.

At the range, campers tried out their archery skills. Certified archery instructor, Robert Moore, provided campers with youth sized bows, arrows, regular and fun targets such as balloons and 3D animals.

An equally anticipated activity among campers was target shooting, led by Range Master Charlie Schillinsky and Serge Ruiz. Depending on age and size, campers had the chance to shoot BB guns, .17, .22, .243 and .30-30 caliber rifles, as well as 20 and 12 gauge shotguns.



Matt and Diane Meyer and Dennis Corvello taught campers about the Wood Duck project that takes place on many W.U. properties. Each group hammered and nailed together a wood duck box that was later hung on various trees and fence posts that lined the two Clarke lakes.

Campers also built their own “mini” wood duck box birdhouse that they later took home.

With so many fun and engaging activities, by mid-day of each day many campers and volunteers were ready to relax and spend time resting and playing games in camp with Ryan Carder, tying flies with Jeff Conwell or cooling off by swimming and boating at the lake.

The last night of camp came all too soon. Parents were welcomed to join “Tent City” for the final dinner and campfire. Campers made handmade ice cream for the featured dessert. The kids shared everything they had been up to for the last few days and begged not to go home. Parents were thrilled at all their children had gained from camp and expressed their gratitude to the volunteers. Camp was quickly coming to an end; it was time to say goodbye.

On Sunday morning, “Tent City” came down, campers resisted packing and cars began filling up and driving away. For all it was sad to see the campers leave, but OH! What a great night sleep all the volunteers would all get!

Truly, we could not have asked for a better group of kids, a better committed and qualified group of volunteers or greater sponsors. It was a wonderful feeling to see all the hard work come together in such a fantastic way. WUF and W.U. would like to thank the many volunteers, sponsors and staff members that made camp possible. First and foremost, thank you to the Clarke Ranch owners, without you, there would not have been a camp. Thank you to: Alpen Optics, Safari Club of America, the NRA, CDF&G, Mark Wojdylak with BAC & Associates, Mike Sivila, Jim and Katrina Perry, Francis Erickhoff and Chris Conner for making donations. Thank you to the volunteers! Group Leaders: Dennis Corvello, Wes Tamson, Matt Norton and Ryan Carder. Junior Group Leaders and Helpers: Sean and Kevin Kindelt and Kevin Natsios. Activity Leaders and Camp Helpers: Robert Moore, Matt and Diane Meyers, Charlie Schillinsky Jeff Conwell, Ann Thornburgh, Erick Rice, Ed and Kim Cornelius, Will Perry and Camp Chef, Richard Ambrosino. W.U. staff members, John “Bubba” Parker, Serge Ruiz, Jimmy Boggs, Rick Copeland,

Geri Carder, and Mick and Jackie Anderson, thank you. And a big thank you to the parents and campers!