

# Camp Paddle & Cast Reborn

*Rob Denkhaus, Nature Center Manager*



*First fish = huge SMILE and a great, never-to-be-forgotten memory! FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Nature Center offered a program known as Camp Paddle & Cast geared toward inner-city youth who had little or no opportunity to immerse themselves in nature. The program was offered through the City of Fort Worth's network of community centers and, over the years, served to introduce hundreds of youth to camping, paddling canoes, fishing, and the great outdoors. Budget cuts and other factors led to the

discontinuation of the program despite its award-winning success (Camp Paddle & Cast received the 1998 Innovative Programming Award from the DFW Metro Area Director's Association).



*Two campers on their first canoe trip. FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

Years later, I still find myself thinking back to Camp Paddle & Cast and how effective it was in fulfilling the Nature Center's mission, "To enhance the quality of life by enrolling and educating our community in the preservation and protection of natural areas while standing as an example of these same principles and values in North Central Texas." In addition, it was apparent that we had a cure for "nature deficit disorder," a condition that has

plagued our youngest generation.

It's these thoughts and memories that make me proud to announce that we are bringing back Camp Paddle & Cast this summer! In July, we will be hosting youth from eight Fort Worth community centers, who will visit the Nature Center to spend the night under the stars while learning the basics of camping, fishing, and paddling.

Each group will consist of up to 15 youth and a community center staff member, who, along with Nature Center staff and volunteers, will canoe the West Fork of the Trinity River while learning about topics as diverse as aquatic ecology and teamwork. After canoeing, participants will learn how to cast a fishing rod while playing a game known as Backyard Bass. This is a great activity to teach hand-eye coordination.

Back at camp, following the evening's activities, the campers will help prepare a traditional camp meal of hot dogs cooked over the fire before embarking on a naturalist-led night hike to look for nocturnal animals



*Discovering the wonders of what lives in the water. FWNC&R Staff Photo.*



*Canoeing requires concentration and, sometimes, overcoming fears and misconceptions. FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

such as armadillos. The naturalist may even engage in some owl calling in an attempt to coax an owl into view! Returning to camp, participants will partake in yet another campfire favorite—s'mores—before preparing to settle down for a restful night of tent camping.

In the morning, after a sunrise wake-up and a camp breakfast, the campers will get to use their newfound casting skills by going fishing in the Lotus Marsh. This is the only time fishing is permitted in the marsh and is a real treat, especially for those who catch their first fish. Past campers have caught some impressive fish, which creates memories that will never be forgotten.

After fishing and before it begins to get uncomfortably warm, the campers will return home tired and satisfied, having experienced many new things and having gained a newfound appreciation for nature and the outdoors. While not cured, hopefully their nature deficit disorder will at least be in remission.

This exciting and highly valuable program is funded solely by the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. The Nature Center's staff extends thanks to all the members and supporters who provided the funding necessary to offer valuable quality programming such as this so that we can further our mission.



*A much younger Rob Denkhaus helps a young camper learn to cast a fishing rod. FWNC&R Staff Photo.*