



LEAFLET

Fontenelle Forest News | Fall 2023

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Top, left: Homebrewers Anonymous at Beer on the Boardwalk (July 2023); Top, right: Summer Land Stewardship Intern, Yasmin Urzua-Gutierrez, presenting her capstone project (August 2023); Bottom, left: Campers making paper at Lil' Acorns camp (July 2023); Bottom, right: Participants hiking during Nature's Enchanted Changes summer camp (August 2023).

Cover image: The Riverview Boardwalk in the fall.

EDUCATION OVERVIEW

Denise Lewis, Director of Programs

You've probably heard the old saying "The lazy days of summer." Fontenelle Forest's Education Department experiences the opposite each year during the warmer months! From eight weeks of summer camps, to ongoing partner programs and numerous off-site raptor and critter programs, it seems as though we cram a semester's worth of programming into just a couple of months.

In early August, the chaos slows down. Our Naturalist Educators have time to review the successes of the summer, reflect on funny experiences and plan changes for the next season. Our team also takes advantage of this time to focus on professional

development and recharge before preparing programs for the school year.

Our 2022-23 school program attendance included students from six metro area school districts, with 3,357 students taught in the fall and 4,377 students taught in the spring. Although these numbers are low compared to pre-Covid attendance, they have been steadily increasing each semester. While students can learn about nature as they watch a show on TV, do research on their computers or follow nature-based social media accounts on their phones, nothing compares to the actual outdoors! Smelling a wildflower, spotting a fox's footprints, hearing wild turkeys call or the leaves rustling in the wind are experiences best encountered in nature, not through a screen.

With a dynamic and creative group of educators and volunteers, we look forward to educating even more students this coming year!



Fontenelle Forest's Education Department.

FIELD NOTES *From the Forest*

*Deborah Woracek,
Naturalist Educator*

These field notes are based on past observations. Due to climate change and past droughts, you may notice some of these sightings on earlier dates or maybe not even see them this year!



October

The trails are busy as the Forest prepares for the coming winter. At the end of the month, deer will begin to breed. Our nights will become much quieter, except for some owls calling. The local bats will either migrate or begin to hibernate.



November

Once the trees are bare, it becomes much easier to see where the squirrels put their large leaf and stick nests, called dreys. Poison ivy and sumac leaves provide splashes of red in our landscape. If we have a wet fall, be sure to look for fungus along the trails as you hike!



December

The Great Marsh is quieter now, as the muskrats and beaver spend most of their time surviving on what food they stored for the winter. Look close as you explore the trails for signs of animal life, like scraps from a rodent's meal or flattened plants where a deer made its bed.

Let us know what you see along our trails by emailing info@fontenelleforest.org or tagging [@FontenelleForest](https://www.instagram.com/FontenelleForest) on social media.

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO NATURE-BASED EDUCATION

Denise Lewis, Director of Programs

Fontenelle Forest's partnerships are essential for providing equitable access to nature to students who might not be able to visit on their own. The essence of our mission is to provide a place where people can experience and enjoy nature, allowing people of all ages to understand and appreciate our local ecosystems, native plants and wildlife by seeing it firsthand.

FONTENELLE FOREST + DO SPACE

Fontenelle Forest and Do Space launched a partnership in 2022 with the goal of inspiring children to love both technology and nature through science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programming.

In February of 2023, Fontenelle Forest hosted over 300 attendees of all ages to explore the connection between technology and nature. Children were able to experience flying like a bird using a virtual reality headset, experiment with a wind tunnel, program small robots and more. Free transportation was provided to attendees from Do Space's location in Omaha to the Nature Center in Bellevue.



Attendees engaged with several STEM activities during Do Space at the Forest, including creating and testing their own flying crafts in a wind tunnel.

Fontenelle Forest's Education and Raptor Departments also spent a day at Do Space, sharing our nature expertise with visitors. Forest staff took natural artifacts for 3-D printing demonstrations, simulated raptor aerodynamics through building paper airplanes, and offered close-up encounters with turtles and snakes. Both events provided a fun way to learn about nature and technology.

KINDERS IN THE WILD

During both the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years, Fontenelle Forest has provided no-cost field trips to kindergarten students at underserved schools in our community. The generosity of a private donor has enabled the Forest to accommodate these field trips, which include an educational, nature-based program and a guided hike in the Forest. Our staff is proud to be a part of introducing the love of nature to these young students. We hope these visits to the Forest result in a lifelong appreciation for our environment.

These partnerships, along with others you can read about in this issue, allow the community access to the Forest at no cost. **If you are interested in providing equitable access to Fontenelle Forest through a donation or partnership, contact Emily Prauner by email at eprauner@fontenelleforest.org or phone at 402-731-3140.**



Kindergarten classes visit Fontenelle Forest on a field trip at no cost thanks to a generous private donor.

EXPLORING THE WONDERS OF NATURE AT SUMMER CAMP

Hannah Miller, Naturalist Educator
Abby Swanda, Naturalist Educator

From outdoor spaces filled with visitors to gardens bursting with blooms, summer in Nebraska is a busy time of year! This is especially true at Fontenelle Forest, where we host hundreds of children at summer camps and other educational experiences. Two of our locations, Camp Wa-Kon-Da and Camp Brewster, host our day camps serving children ages 6 through 15.

Here at the Nature Center, we work closely with two fantastic organizations to offer unique partner summer camps. During Farm to Forest camp, campers split their day between Gifford Farm and the Fontenelle Forest Nature Center. In the mornings, campers meet farm animals, take hayrides and experience life on the farm. After a well-earned lunch, the campers ride a bus to the Forest where we spend the afternoons making crafts, hiking and observing the natural world. The structure of this camp provides an opportunity for campers to explore two different ways that

people interact with animals and nature while learning through games, crafts and making new friends!

Through our summer partnership with Lauritzen Gardens, campers spend three days at the Gardens and two days at Fontenelle Forest. Campers receive an immersive experience at each location, while building friendships with other campers ages 5 through 12. We delve into the similarities and differences between the flora and fauna at each location, make thematic artwork and celebrate International Mud Day with a mud party!

Summer camps are an enriching experience for campers, guardians and counselors alike - and our camp offerings just keep growing! This year, Lil' Acorns camp (ages 3 to 5) was moved to the Nature Center for three hours of nature-based fun every day! We also added two exciting new camp themes: Nature's Enchanted Changes (ages 6 to 8) and Nature's Engineers (ages 9 to 12). Finally, we are doubling our number of campers for Winter and Spring Break Camps - check our website for more information.

Thanks to our incredible counselors, robust community engagement and interdepartmental support, we are able to inspire a love of nature in children from all walks of life.



Campers from our Lauritzen Gardens partner camp enjoyed celebrating International Mud Day with a messy mud party!



Campers looked for insects to observe in their natural habitats.



Farm to Forest campers enjoyed story time while surrounded by nature.

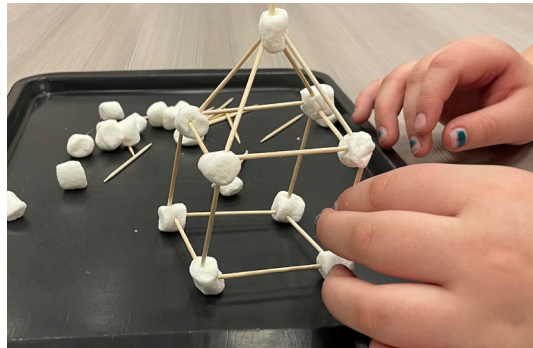
BRIDGING THE GAP: STEM & Nature

Lauren Walker, Education Program Manager

When you think of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), Fontenelle Forest is likely not the first organization that comes to mind. Many are surprised to discover that our Education Department provides after-school STEM in Nature programming to several Omaha Public School students. This program is funded through a grant from the Peter Kiewit Foundation with programming arranged through Collective for Youth, a nonprofit agency that connects Out-of-School Time providers with resources and programming.

The main goal of the Forest's programming is to consistently provide engaging lessons focused on STEM principles with a connection to nature and the environment. A fundamental understanding of science, technology, engineering and math can pave the way for future innovators to tackle the challenges of environmental preservation. This directly supports our mission of inspiring future generations to care for the natural world.

Within this framework, we strive to provide hands-on, science-based experiences that would typically be unavailable during traditional classroom lessons. Our naturalist educators design and teach activities that cover a broad range of topics including physics, chemistry, biology, environmental conservation, geometry and math. This allows our students to explore elements of their science and math curriculum in a way that is both low-stress and fun. A few activities that are always a big hit include owl pellet dissection, building structures with toothpicks and marshmallows, and creating a model oil pipeline. Our educators are proud to be positive adult role models who encourage students to love learning and to stay engaged in school. We look forward to another school year full of learning and exploration.



Building a structure out of toothpicks and marshmallows provides students a hands-on activity to develop their engineering skills.

Traveling Seniors Understanding Nature

The Traveling Seniors Understanding Nature program (TSUN) takes nature presentations to senior living facilities. Fontenelle Forest's naturalist educators aim to provide an enriching experience with an informative presentation, covering various nature topics that help seniors develop a better understanding of the natural world, enhance their quality of life and spark curiosity.

October 2023: Nature in Autumn

Discover how plants and animals prepare to survive winter.

November 2023: A Country Pond

Learn about the plants and animals that live in and around ponds.

December 2023: Winter in the Woods

Explore how animals thrive, even in the depths of the bitter cold.

January 2024: Making Tracks!

Learn how to differentiate between various animal tracks.

February 2024: Nebraska's Natural History

Discover the fascinating animals that once lived in Nebraska.

March 2024: The History of Fontenelle Forest

Learn about the people who lived at the Forest throughout the last one thousand years.

Interested in scheduling a TSUN program for your adult or senior group?
Contact Lauren Walker, Education Program Manager, at 402-731-3140.

UPCOMING SENIORS UNDERSTANDING NATURE PROGRAMS

Are you a lifelong learner? Join us for Seniors Understanding Nature (SUN)! Each month a guest speaker will educate us on a natural or regional historic topic.

SUN is held from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. on the second Tuesday during the specified months below:
January through May
September through December

Free for members or with daily admission for non-members.



October 10, 2023
Unbe-leaf-able: Tree ID 101

presented by Justin Everton,
Nebraska Statewide Arboretum



November 14, 2023

Sandhill Cranes:
Nebraska's Ancient Migrants

presented by Ron Cisar,
Biologist and Ecologist



December 12, 2023

Grit 'n' Gumption: Women Homesteading
in Nebraska from 1860 to 1895

presented by Cherrie Beam-Callaway,
Humanities Nebraska speaker and reenactor

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT:

Catherine Kuper

Lauren Walker, Education Program Manager

Catherine Kuper is a familiar face to many at Fontenelle Forest. Since the 1980s, Catherine has dedicated well over 1,000 hours of her life to the Forest as a volunteer. We are grateful she's allowed us to shine our volunteer spotlight on her, so that we may tell her Forest story and give our visitors a glimpse into the many interesting times she has spent here.

Catherine defines herself primarily as an educator. She is a former teacher and principal who derives great satisfaction in helping others learn. It was this love of learning that initially drew her to Fontenelle Forest. Here, she found a place where she could both help others expand their knowledge of the natural world and satisfy her own curiosity. Early on she had a particular interest in birds; a love that she still carries with her to this day. She is grateful to the avid birders she met at the Forest, including Clem Klaphake, Eric Scholar, Bob Fuchs, Betty Grenon, Kate Murphy and Craig Hensley. They all played a significant role in helping her hone her birding skills and develop a deeper appreciation of all aspects of the Forest.

Previous to volunteering, Catherine worked as a Naturalist Educator for the Forest for 16 years. Beginning in 2000, she led senior education programs like Traveling Seniors Understanding Nature (TSUN) and Seniors Understanding Nature (SUN) lecture series. She is still well-known and admired by many for her role in these programs. Even though she was ready to retire in 2016, she did not want to leave the Forest behind. She knew she had “found a good community of people who were seriously interested in the natural world,” which made her feel at home here.

Catherine decided to transition to contributing as a Forest volunteer. Her initial project was to help organize a trove of historical artifacts collected by Gary Garabrandt and numerous others. Upon completion, she delved into the archives room. She loved learning from the stories, maps and various artifacts! She told her Forest colleagues, “If I go in there and follow the history, I may never come out.” Fortunately for us, that is exactly what happened! To this day, Catherine continues to be our volunteer archivist and historical researcher.

Catherine has been an instrumental contributor in the design of two historical exhibits here at the Forest; the *Nebraska Phase Culture* exhibit completed in 2018 and our current



Catherine Kuper, volunteer archivist, speaking at a Seniors Understanding Nature program.

historical exhibit, *Nebraska's Deep Roots*, which highlights the history of Fontenelle's Trading Post. One of her fondest memories of her Forest story centers on a portrait of Logan Fontenelle himself. Several years ago, Catherine came across old notes in our archives about the original sketch of the portrait of Logan Fontenelle, indicating who may currently own the painting. She called the number listed, and to her amazement, the woman still had the painting (which she had acquired at a garage sale)! The owner agreed to donate it to Fontenelle Forest. This portrait has been fully restored and now proudly hangs in the main lobby of the Nature Center.

Fontenelle Forest staff and leadership give our sincerest thanks to Catherine Kuper for being an inspiration and support to so many Forest members, guests, staff and volunteers over the past four decades. We look forward to the new discoveries she has yet to uncover in our archives and the lively stories she is sure to share.

FROM RESEARCH TO REALITY:

Nebraska's Deep Roots

Catherine Kuper, Volunteer Archivist

When I first realized that the construction of the Fontenelle Trading Post occurred 200 years ago, I began to unravel the details of a history that I knew nothing about. With each new piece of the story, I was drawn into intriguing events that led to even more stories. I would often say, with great enthusiasm to others here at the Forest, "This is so fascinating!"

The events portrayed in the *Nebraska's Deep Roots* exhibit tell the story of the Trading Post itself, the Fontenelle family, the richness of the Indigenous people and the dynamics of the fur trade.

The fur trade brought many opportunities for travel west, exploration of rivers and mountains, and interaction with new people and cultures. The lives of Indigenous people who lived on the Great Plains were changed forever. There were great moments and times of desperation.

All of these events precede the existence of Bellevue, Omaha and the state of Nebraska. So often, when people wander into the exhibit we hear them say, "I didn't know this." Part of Fontenelle Forest's mission is to educate and inspire current and future generations to care about the natural world, which includes our history.

It is important to tell these stories, because they fill in the gaps between our lives today and the lives of people who lived here before us. When you look a little more deeply,



Catherine Kuper, volunteer archivist at Fontenelle Forest, with Rob Bozell, retired Nebraska State Archeologist. Together they researched and wrote the content for the *Nebraska's Deep Roots* exhibit.

the challenges and joys are the same, often for different reasons. History is the story of change that happens over time. Being reminded of those changes and their effects can deepen the reality of our lives today and hopefully cause us to think more deeply about the steps and directions we are taking today.

I often tell others that my passion is education and helping people learn. I am grateful to Fontenelle Forest for letting me do so much learning and for the opportunity to engage so many of you in that same pursuit.

UPCOMING FONTENELLE TRADING POST SPEAKER SERIES & EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Sunday, October 1

1:00 PM | Omaha Tribe Perspective

on the Fur Trade

Speaker: Taylor Keen

3:30 PM | Guided Hike of History Trail

Sunday, November 5

1:00 PM | Peter Sarpy

and the Fur Trade

Speaker: Ben Justman

Educational Trading Post Docents: September 30 and November 4

On select Saturdays, a volunteer educational docent will be available in the early afternoons (times may vary).

To learn more about Trading Post exhibit, programs and to provide feedback, visit FontenelleForest.org/TradingPost or scan the QR code.



TALON TALES:

Raptor Department Update

*Kathy Fischer, Raptor Program Manager
Deborah Woracek, Naturalist Educator*

The Raptor Department has had an active year out and about in our community and beyond. Our staff and volunteers have visited schools, scout programs, summer camps and libraries with our raptor and critter educational ambassadors. Fontenelle Forest's statewide raptor conservation education efforts have taken our staff and volunteers to Grand Island, Norfolk, Fremont and Western Iowa, as well as all over the Omaha area to educate the public.

The Forest has embarked on a new partnership with the Union Omaha soccer team, whose mascot is an owl. Forest staff have attended several Union Omaha soccer matches with the team's educational raptor ambassador, Orion, the Great Horned Owl. Our raptor care specialists and volunteers enjoy talking with attendees at the games about the importance of raptor conservation and sharing information about all Fontenelle Forest has to offer.

Orion is not only an ambassador for Union Omaha, he is also the official educational raptor ambassador for the nearby new Omaha Public School, Forest Station Elementary. He has continued to thrive in his role as a raptor ambassador for educational programs, both at the Forest and off-site even with these added duties!

In July, the Raptor Department welcomed a new raptor care specialist, Ell Kinsey! Previously, Ell volunteered with the Iowa Raptor Project. We are excited to have Ell on our team as she leads educational raptor programs and assists with the daily care of our raptors on-site.

As always, we welcome Forest visitors to the Raptor Woodland



Orion, the Great Horned Owl, and Denise Lewis, Fontenelle Forest's Director of Programs, at a Union Omaha soccer match in May.

Refuge to view and learn about our amazing birds of prey, both big and small! Stop by our Gyrfalcon's enclosure to see the world's largest falcon species, then be sure to visit our American Kestrel, which is one of the smallest members of the falcon family. There are over a dozen species to observe and learn about within the Raptor Woodland Refuge, which is open daily from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

Thank you for supporting Fontenelle Forest's raptor education and conservation efforts. We hope to see you at an upcoming program or in the Raptor Woodland Refuge!

Are you interested in booking an on- or off-site raptor or critter program?

Are you interested in booking a visit from our educational raptors or critters to your school, organization, club or birthday party? Come face-to-face with some of our raptors or critters as you learn all about these amazing animals. Our trained staff and volunteer presenters are experienced in tailoring presentations to a wide variety of audiences and group sizes.

Visit FontenelleForest.org/Raptors to learn more about scheduling a raptor or critter program.

BACK TO SCHOOL:

Raptor Style

Ell Kinsey, Raptor Care Specialist

Next time your kids don't want to see the doctor, remind them that even Fontenelle Forest's raptors have to brave their back-to-school physicals.

In early August, the raptor team buckled down to give each bird a thorough exam. This article provides a behind-the-scenes look at what these examinations entail. First, the bird is cast—meaning a handler restrains the bird in a manner to ensure everyone's safety, especially that of the raptor. Once an accurate weight of the raptor is recorded, the team conducts a physical examination, assessing the condition of the feathers, eyes, feet, beak and wings. Birds tend to mask illness, so clues like dramatic weight drops, or discharge from the eyes or nostrils, can help caretakers identify sickness and intervene.

Feathers are obviously unique to birds, but they come with their own set of complications. When a new feather—called a pin feather—starts to grow, the shaft obtains its own blood supply. The pin feather grows, covered in a waxy sheath that the bird will preen away once the feather is done growing, at which point blood will no longer circulate through the feather. During the time when there is a blood supply, it's imperative that the pin feather not break. A broken shaft acts as a siphon. The bird can lose blood very quickly and ultimately bleed out. Should a "blood feather" break, the feather must be removed, either by the bird or a caretaker. The skin closes at the base, stopping the hemorrhage. The birds who live in the Raptor Woodland Refuge due to previous wing injuries, tend to develop blood feathers during this time of year. Again, making the examinations vital to keeping our raptors healthy.

In the wild, birds of prey are constantly on the move, landing on a variety of perches and eating a variety of prey. These actions keep the beak and talons filed down. Because the Forest's raptors can't survive in the wild due to their injuries or upbringing sustained prior to coming to the Forest, their beaks can grow to an unhealthy curve and their talons can catch and tear upon perching. For this reason, our birds' beaks and talons are manually trimmed and filed down, sometimes several times a year. During the most recent round of physicals, many of the raptors required at least a talon trim.

Finally, the birds received their only vaccine, which is to



Denise Lewis, Director of Programs, and Bob Wells, raptor volunteer, inspects a bald eagle's talons during its annual physical examination.

protect against West Nile Virus (WNV). Birds are more susceptible to this than humans, and the species of mosquito that tends to carry WNV reaches Nebraska around August. Bob Wells, a raptor volunteer and a former anesthesiologist, is well-versed in dosing medication. Denise Lewis, Director of Programs, has loads of experience giving birds vaccines, which the raptors received in their breast muscle.

Nothing overtly concerning was found during the check-ups, though two owls will visit a veterinarian eye specialist in the next month to assess for possible cataracts.

It's important to recognize that while these exams can cause a raptor stress, the team undergoes much preparation to ensure the process is as efficient as possible. Each exam averaged less than five minutes.

Each of our 23 resident raptor ambassadors was swiftly returned to their respective enclosures in the Raptor Woodland Refuge once their examination was complete.

Support the care of Fontenelle Forest's raptors by donating at FontenelleForest.org/raptors or scan the QR code!



FEATURED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Experience fall at Fontenelle Forest!
Check out these upcoming events to get outside and enjoy nature.



Family Adventure Day | October 9

Bring the whole family and join us for a fun and exciting day of archery, hiking and campfire building at Camp Wa-Kon-Da!



Scales and Tails | October 28

This fun, family program will include slime-making, decorating Halloween cookies, animal encounters and more educational activities.



Holiday Décor Creation | November 11

Bring your creativity and join us for a fun night making holiday decorations from native and invasive materials found in the Forest.



Owl Prowl | November 17 & 18

Join us as we explore the mysterious world of owls. Learn about the owls of Nebraska and meet our educational owl ambassadors up close.

Last Chance to Get Feather Our Nest Tickets!

Feather Our Nest is our largest annual benefit. Join us to celebrate the mission of Fontenelle Forest and our accomplishments on October 6 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Visit FontenelleForest.org/FON to support the Forest by purchasing tickets or making a donation. Tickets are available through September 20.

Nature Center Will Close at 3 p.m. on October 6

The Nature Center and surrounding trails will close early for our annual Feather Our Nest fundraiser. The trails at Neale Woods Nature Reserve, the Wetlands, Camp Logan and Camp Wa-Kon-Da will remain open to the public.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & UPDATES



December 4 - 7 All Forest Trails Closed

Fontenelle Forest will be conducting our annual managed deer hunt. All Fontenelle Forest trails will be closed. Neale Woods trails will remain open.



Dec. 9 - Jan. 2 Winter Wonderland

Each year during the month of December, we transform our Great Hall into a Winter Wonderland for all to enjoy! Free for members or with daily admission for non-members.



December 9-10 Winter Wonderland Opening Weekend

Bring the whole family for a weekend of holiday celebration at Fontenelle Forest. Walk the lighted boardwalk or get crafty at Holiday Habitat Building! Free for members or with daily admission for non-members.

See our full calendar of events and register online at FontenelleForest.org/Calendar



Fontenelle Forest

1111 Bellevue Blvd. North
Bellevue, NE 68005

FROM THE ARCHIVES:

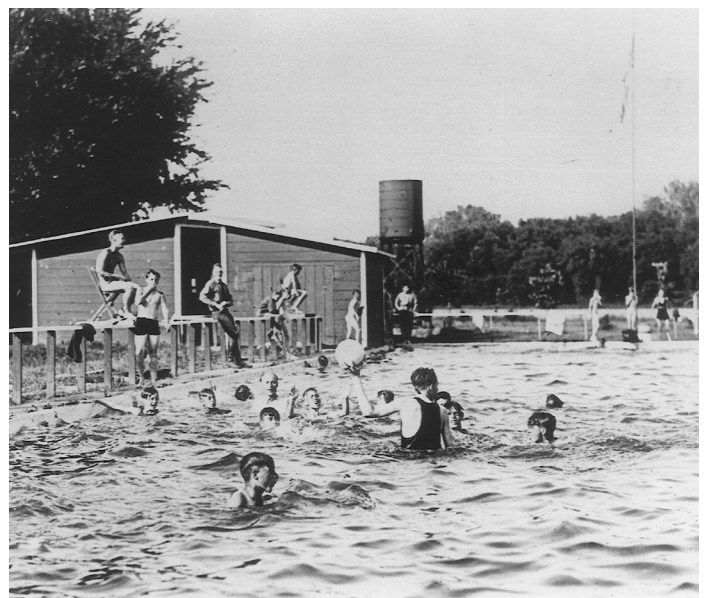
Boy Scout Camp Water Tower

Catherine Kuper, Volunteer Archivist

Nature Center visitors may have noticed a new educational display case in the Great Hall. The display case is a reproduction of the water tower that stood for many years at Gifford Boy Scout Camp, near Fontenelle Forest's wetlands. The Boy Scout camp operated in that location from 1919 to 1945 and closed in 1947 due to repeated floods. This property was then transitioned to Fontenelle Forest.

In the early days, boys would take the train to camp and get off at the stop for Camp Gifford. The camp could accommodate 125 boys. A major attraction was the spring-fed swimming pool, which was apparently very cold. One boy described the water temperature as "five degrees warmer than ice." The water tower seen in the picture was used to store water until it was needed in the pool.

Looking closely at the display case, you can see various messages carved by climbers over the years. Don't you



The water tower stored water for the swimming pool at the Gifford Boy Scout Camp between the 1920's and 1940's.

wonder what happened to "Ron and Mary?"

The pool was finally filled with soil in 1952, but the wooden water tower remained until recent years. Thick redwood staves and steel tension rings are all that remain at the tower's original location.