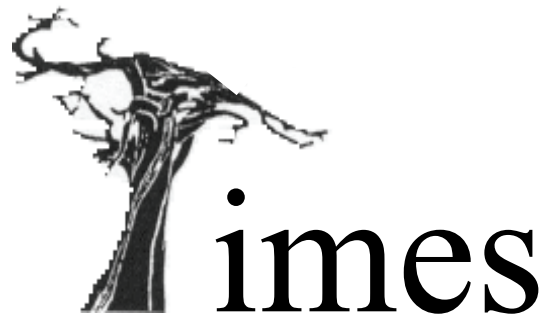




taft

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Spring 2010

Northern Illinois University

Lorado Taft Field Campus

Oregon, IL

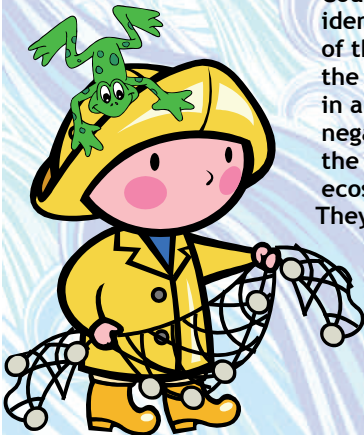
Uncovering the Life of a River



No doubt viewing the winding Rock River from atop the bluff is one of the most memorable experiences enjoyed by visitors to Taft Campus. The Rock River dates back to before glaciers formed the Great Lakes, and while visitors can contemplate the thousands of years of human history that took place along its banks, every season heralds new life along and within its waters. Many who gaze from the Eternal Indian statue, from the Dining Hall, or from down on our new River Ridge Trail are treated to sightings of bald eagles, great blue heron, migrating bands of cranes and white pelicans. Anglers join the frenzy, flocking to the water in search of catfish, walleye, pike, bass, sauger, bluegill, drum and bullheads that spawn in the warming waters. Muskrats, beavers, raccoons, white-tailed deer, and red fox are just a few of the mammals becoming active by the river. Songbirds fill the morning and day air with their calls, while dusk is welcomed by a chorus of frogs. The emergence of spring is a wonderful time to rediscover all of the life returning to the river, a time when even the noisy hordes of Canada Geese are welcome. And yet most casual observers are unaware of one of the most important transformations, one which occurs within the river itself, in places that few visitors to Taft ever explore.

Along the banks and in the mouth of the delta, students at Taft are finding hundreds of tiny organisms every week. These creatures, which they soon discover are called macroinvertebrates, create an important base for the ecosystem of the entire stream. As they skim through muck and mud, gently scoop under the rocks and logs that make up the non-living habitat of the ecosystem, outdoor education students find that mud is no longer just mud; a bug is not just a bug! Within the watery muck there are hundreds of thousands of macroinvertebrates, at various stages of growth. Students find scuds, caddisfly larvae in mobile homes of leaf and plant debris, colorful dobsonfly larva, and tadpoles to name a few. As they sift through the muck, they not only discover how much life is contained within the mud of the delta and river bank, but the significance of the diversity of macroinvertebrates and other organisms they find. Through classification charts, students discover that while a scud or snail is fairly tolerant to pollution, a stonefly or dragonfly nymph, or caddisfly larva are intolerant to pollution in the river. Research shows that the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency has classified the Ogle County portion of the Rock River as "good," but here students soon realize that by catching and identifying macroinvertebrates in the muck, they can also evaluate first-hand the health conditions of the river, and the life that depends upon it. In the process, students draw connections between the health of the river and the organisms that depend upon it, as well as the vital role water plays in all lives, including their own. While they discuss ways in which humans may have a positive or negative impact upon their water ways and watersheds, students who explore the water ecology of the Rock River at Taft Campus have gained invaluable insight into how the food web within an ecosystem is supported by the smallest, seemingly insignificant of organisms. They will never again just see mud as mud and a bug as a bug!

Sources: <http://pages.ripco.net/~jwn/rock.html>
Taft Biotic Index





Busy Bees!

On your next trip to Taft, you will notice many differences as you traverse the campus. Many changes have occurred throughout the year as a result of some very busy worker bees from Taft and visiting schools, including Mount Carmel Academy and Washington Gifted School. Here, we would like to highlight a few so that you can be sure to check out some of our changes during your trip!

- ✦ **CRAFT SHOP COLOR**—If your school uses this building (behind the Funeral Procession statue), you will see that we have added a splash of color to revitalize the area and boost creativity.
- ✦ **NATIVE AMERICAN SITES SWITCHED**—We moved the longhouse to the Delta area and the wigwam has gone out towards South Field. It is more historically accurate for large, summer camps to be close to the waterways for traveling and agriculture and for smaller family units to be further inland during the winter.
- ✦ **BIRD PORCH BEAUTIFICATION**—Behind Poley, we have been working hard transplanting some spring ephemerals to help beautify the area and attract more birds, using native vegetation. Some of the wildflowers you will see include Dutchman's Breeches, May Apples, Bloodroot, and Columbine.
- ✦ **NEW HERB GARDEN**—Next to the Dining Hall (in front of the Weather Station) you will find our newest edition: A raised flower bed containing many tasty herbs! It can be used in many classes or just to pass the time while waiting for the bell to ring.
- ✦ **PRAIRIE BURNS**—You will notice that we have done some spring burning on campus, in the woodlands and the prairie plots. These have been done to help return necessary nutrients to the soil and promote growth of native vegetation.
- ✦ **TRAIL SIGNS**—We have begun placing trail signs to assist new teachers in finding their way around. These signs will lead you places such as the Survival Site, Instincts Field, Teams Course, Native Sights, and South Field. We hope these will better guide you on your adventures through the forest!



- ✦ **THE RIVER RIDGE TRAIL**—The project that we are most proud of this year would not have been possible without everyone's help. We blazed an impressive trail that stretches from the Delta, along the Rock River, up to the Quarry, and all the way to Ganymede Spring! One of the most beautiful trails, it replaces the River Trail that washed away in previous years due to erosion. The trail was specially designed, using techniques similar to those on the Appalachian Trail that prevent erosion. Access to the trail requires going up and down some pretty steep stairs and takes 30-45 minutes to walk, but is definitely worth the trek!

**A BIG
THANK YOU**
to those that have
put much of their
extra time and
effort into making
these projects
possible!





Nights Without Lights!?

When the sun goes down, the campus lights up! We're not just talking about the lamp posts!

Whether your group is searching through the woods for the Alpha Wolf, taking a Night Hike, or star gazing out in South Field, your "night vision" will allow you to see many little faces beaming with joy after experiencing activities that just can't happen back at school. For some students, this might be their first night away from home. For others, a night hike without flashlights might have seemed impossible before now. The one activity that the students definitely have not experienced before coming here is the thing that we hear them singing about well after they leave: TAFT CAMPFIRE! Not a single one is the same, and each group adds their own flavor to it!

Our campfires follow the lifespan of the fire: The sequence starts out with quite a few loud, silly songs to get the students excited and moving around. Then we throw in a goofy skit or two (often involving the teachers) and listen to the laughter roll. There might be some funny stories and then quieter songs as the flames trickle on. As the fire dies out, we try to end with a relaxation activity and then send the students to snack or off to bed. We've found that the silliness of the adults that lead and watch the campfire can equate to how silly the kids will be too! Participation and careful planning gives the best results.

Taft campfires can be done at the Chimney, Delta, South Field, or Pioneer Cabin, depending on group size. In the event of bad weather, they can be done inside Poley or Eagle's Nest. For those of you looking for songs and stories for your own campfires, below are some links that will send you on your way. It has also been helpful to look up videos of the songs being preformed. The best part: if you forget a line or make a mistake no one will know because it's probably the first time they have seen it!

<http://www.ultimatecampresource.com/site/camp-activities/camp-songs.html>
<http://www.songsforteaching.com/campfiresongs/>

If campfires just aren't for you, other nighttime activities can be just as enchanting! Learn about wolves in a large group game, use your 5 senses or walk solo on night hikes, get creative with Dutch Auction, build planispheres or use the telescope in Astronomy, and if the weather gets rough, there is always Jeopardy! Ask your coordinator if you would like any information regarding these activities.



Every campfire is a unique, magical experience!



As we prepare to take on the summer and new job opportunities, the end of our school year leads us to a bit of reflection:

"My time here has been a surprise! Outdoor education is real, hands-on, and fun! I learned new skills and tried things I may not have otherwise. I appreciate experiencing the changes of the seasons and spending my time in the sun, rain, and snow. I am going to miss the companionship of friends and fellow staff members and the relationships we formed with visiting students."

"It is not always planned lessons that are the most memorable, but rather those unexpected, magical discoveries that engage the senses and leave one with a feeling of wonder— seeing baby raccoons playing in a meadow, smelling a rare orchid, hearing tree frogs trill, or feeling slime mold are a few of an infinite number of unique experiences that may happen while spending time outside!"

Variety ~ Fresh air ~ Being a teacher and a student at the same time ~ Singing and dancing ~ Delicious snacks ~ Reflection ~ Patience ~ Getting dirty ~ New connections New ways of thinking ~ Seasonal gear, clothes, sights, and sounds ~ Peace ~ Wildlife encounters ~ Seasonal scavenger hunts ~ Feeling ~ Understanding ~ Surprises Friendships ~ Passing on kindness ~ Hakuna matata

"Outdoor education is giving someone the opportunity to experience nature as they never have before and may never get to again."

"Walking, moving, smelling the air, jumping, and running."

"Watching children *and* adults in a learning environment outside of what they are used to, and especially seeing those flourish whom might not have the opportunity in more structured settings. It's that little something that happens out here that is both unexplainable and unattainable in a classroom."

Laughing and screaming
 Running and breathing
 Silence and stars
 Campfires and guitars

Sunshine and rainstorms
 Composting and feeding worms
 Bug spray and sunscreen
 Hamburgers and ice cream

Oak trees and water study
 Icicles and getting muddy
 Ort reports and food webs
 Sharing showers and bunk beds

Outdoor ed. Is each of these
 And makes each day pass with ease."



Spring Sightings:

Birds

Red-winged Blackbird, Purple
Martin- March 8
Turkey Vulture- March 10
American Robin, Great Blue
Heron- March 11
Sandhill Crane- March 15
Eastern Bluebird -March 20
Great Egret- April 7
Great White Pelican- April 13
Scarlet Tanager- April 23

Amphibians/Reptiles

Garter Snake- April 5
Northern Leopard Frog- April 7
Chorus Frog- April 10
Gray Tree Frog- April 13

Flowers

Hepatica, Bloodroot- March 27
Dutchman's Breeches- April 5
Cutleaf Toothwort, Early
Buttercups- April 8
Marsh Marigold- April 10
Spring Beauty- April 11
Trillium, Wild Ginger, Jack-in-the-
Pulpit, Bellwort, ferns, Bed Straw
-April 12
Downy Yellow Violet- April 13
Wood Anemone- April 14
Wild Geranium, Blue Phlox- April 15
Wild Columbine- May 1
May Apples in full bloom -May 1



Coming Soon: Rose-breasted grosbeaks, hummingbirds, indigo buntings, Baltimore orioles, painted turtles, coyote pups and other babies!

Zero Food Waste Hall Of Fame!

Everyone who comes to Lorado Taft works hard to reduce their food waste. We would like to acknowledge those schools who reached the promised land of zero waste in the past

semester:

Illinois School for the Deaf

Washington Gifted School

Mount Carmel Academy

Teacher Tidbits:

The Taft Campus Nurse sends health forms to the school for distribution to the students. This is the most current version of the form, and it can also be found on our website. Please do not use earlier versions. The Taft Campus Health form must be used as presented and cannot be altered. If your district requires additional forms, feel free to send those along with our health form, as well.



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