



Friends of Freedom Park

200 Monroe St. Prescott, WI 54021

www.freedomparkwi.org 715-262-0104

Supporting the mission of the Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center through membership, volunteer recruitment and fundraising.

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From: Margaret Smith, Executive Director
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Subject: Great River Road Learning Center holds National Park Junior Ranger Program

Date: July 18, 2011

The Great River Road Learning Center began its free 2011 summer Junior Ranger Program on Saturday, July 16. The 4 weekend program is led by National Park Service Rangers and is part of the National Park Service Partner Site relationship with the Great River Road Learning Center. Mississippi National River and Recreation Area Park Rangers Brian Valentine and Holly Marsh will lead the two hour programs held on July 16 and 23. St. Croix National Scenic Riverway Rangers will lead the programs on July 30 and August 6. A graduation ceremony will be held on August 6 as well, with Junior Ranger badges from both National Parks awarded to the participants. For more information about this program for children ages 8-12, contact Margaret Smith, 715-262-0104.



Caption: Kids use binoculars provided by the National Park Service to spot bird species. Participants were allowed to keep the binoculars. Photo by Margaret Smith



Caption: Kids made their own barges and used coins to determine how much weight their boats could carry, as they learned about barge traffic on the Mississippi River from Ranger Brian Valentine. Photo by Margaret Smith



Caption: Participants led by Ranger Holly Marsh, made nature buttons to take home.

U.S. program piques kids' interest in nature, rivers

Junior Rangers aims to get kids outdoors and involved

By Andy Rathbun
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Children from the metro area and western Wisconsin will become some of the newest Junior Rangers in the country Aug. 6 in Prescott, Wis., when they take pledges to learn about, explore and protect the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers.

The Junior Ranger program is run by the National Park Service at parks across the country. Locally, the programs are held at several locations in the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, including Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center in Prescott.

"We connect kids in the Twin Cities metro area with the concept of national parks, and particularly the Mississippi River," said Brian Valentine, a park ranger who leads Junior Ranger programs along the river. "A lot of the kids that live here, they drive over it, and they never get to think about the cool things they can do along the river."

Nicole Torgerson, 12, participated in the Junior Ranger program in Prescott this summer and last and learned about animal tracking, river barges, protecting the environment and other nature-related subjects.

"It's just a lot of fun to be in because I get to meet other kids," said Torgerson, who will be in seventh grade this fall.

Her mother, Jennifer Engstrom, of Prescott, said Nicole "absolutely loved it."

"I think it's fantastic because it actually gets kids involved in outside activities," Engstrom said. "Nowadays kids are so involved in electronics and video games ... it's so nice to have something where they're outside."

Junior Ranger programs date back at least to the 1930s, said Wendy Davis, service-wide education program coordinator for the National Park Service. The program has been growing nationally over the past sev-

eral years.

Since 2005, it has been the park service's "premier program" for families with children, Davis said.

"The program there at the Mississippi River is a fabulous Junior Ranger program," she said. "It's one of the ones I use as an example when I talk about the program."

At Great River Road, which is at Freedom Park at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers, the free program is in its second year. The first session of the summer, which took place for four hours over two Saturdays and focused on the Mississippi, just wrapped up.

There are a few spots open for the second session, which will focus on the St. Croix. It will be held from 10 to 11:30 a.m. this Saturday and Aug. 6. The program is geared toward children ages 8 to 12.

The park service's Valentine said the Junior Ranger programs focus on the national parks where they are held. He added that the programs are meant to meet kids' interests and provoke their curiosity in hopes they will connect with the parks.

"If we don't get kids outdoors and involved, the subsequent generation may or may not care about the places that we (care about)," Valentine said.

TO LEARN MORE

For information about the Prescott program, visit freedomparkwi.org or call 715-262-0106.

For more information about local Junior Ranger programs, visit nps.gov/miss/forkids.

Children who can't get to any of the Junior Ranger locations can participate in an online program the service offers at nps.gov/webrangers.

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Prescott, Wis.

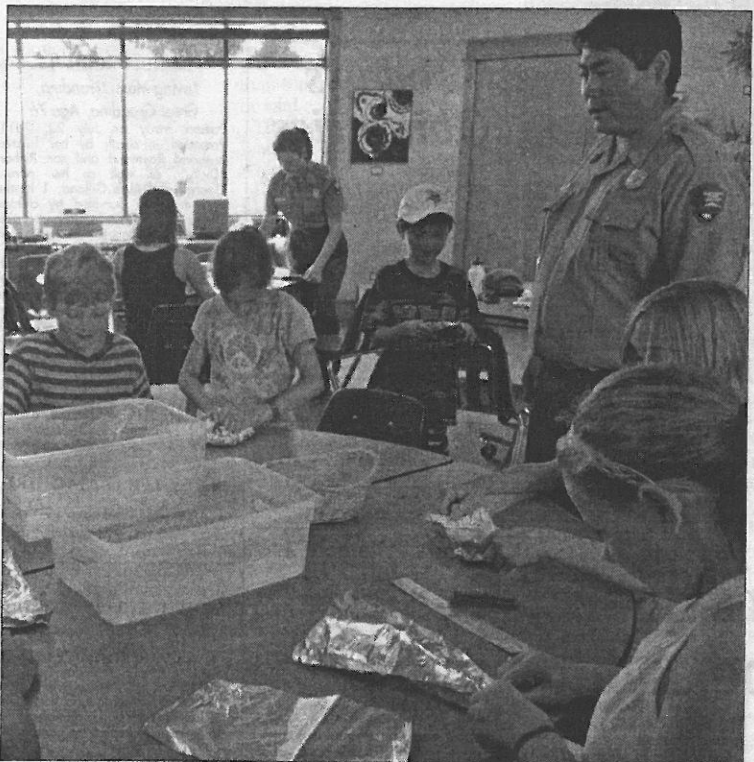


PHOTO COURTESY OF MARGARET SMITH

Kids in the Junior Ranger program at Great River Road Visitor and Learning Center in Prescott, Wis., make tinfoil boats while learning about Mississippi River barge traffic from National Park Service ranger Brian Valentine.