

Educational Activities and Fun at Wildwood

Our children and grandchildren have spent hundreds of hours with us over the past 28 years at Wildwood. The grandchildren often refer to it now as “our cabin.” We have made a practice of integrating educational value into most of the activities that we have set up for them. I believe that many parents and grandparents think that kids have to have fast action like sports or racing RV’s around the roads to have fun. We can attest from long experience that education can be built into the activities that will leave lifelong impressions. Each of the children and grandchildren wrote us a letter and read it at our golden wedding anniversary two years ago. All of them mentioned our Wildwood home and the fun things that they had done in their “fondest memories” of Grandma and Grandpa. It is gratifying to Faye and I that we have provided an opportunity for them to enjoy our rural Wildwood home; the opportunity to bond and promote family values; the opportunity to contribute to their educational experiences; and most importantly, the fact that they recognized the value of the opportunities and experiences that we had provided. We purchased our property at Wildwood 28 years ago with precisely the above goal in mind. And those comments were the ultimate payback. We accomplished that goal.

I have always felt a need to approach any activity, whether it is for work or a fun activity, in an educated way and make it productive in order for it to be meaningful. Those are the underlying objectives of our activities at wildwood. One of the best, but not well recognized, tools available to parents to accomplish this rests in the Boy Scouts of America literature known as merit badges. You may have noted in my credits at the end of each article that I was a long time Boy Scout Master. Both of my sons and all of our grandsons so far, including three grandsons-in-law, obtained the highly recognized honor of an Eagle Scout Award. In turn, our son Jeff has now been a scout master for many years. He grew up experiencing the many benefits and activities that scouting affords to our youth and now is carrying on that tradition.

Now don’t get the idea that you have to be a scout or even a boy to benefit and enjoy the educational activities that is available to anyone that is interested. I mentioned merit badges. The BSA program has well over a hundred merit badge pamphlets available at \$4.95 each and can be purchased at a BSA store at Denver, Colorado Springs or Pueblo or over the internet. Simply dial up scoutstuff.org, click on official catalog and click on literature. Either purchase on line or click on the store location nearest you. These books provide focused educational activities on over one hundred subjects such as: archery, astronomy, basketry, bird study, electricity, fire arms safety, fire safety, fish and wildlife management, forestry, first aid, geology (rocks and minerals), insects, nature, orienteering (map reading and compass), leather tooling, outdoor cooking, pioneering

(knots and ropes), rifle shooting, shotgun shooting, soil and water conservation, weather, wood carving, and many more. Many of them fit right into our Wildwood environment.

You can purchase kits that go along with some of these activities or you can make your own which we generally do as it affords additional bonding and educational value. Take for example basketry. All of us, grandparents, parents and grandchildren made baskets one weekend. We didn't buy the kits. We all made a visit to Antero Reservoir where we each picked a few hands full of reeds in the marshes. I was also directing wildlife viewing activities associated with the wildlife merit badge requirements. So we took our field glasses along and enjoyed spotting and identifying various marsh birds. The rest of the bird viewing was completed at our house, around Wildwood and in the National forest. We generally get up at 5 A.M. and the kids come in and have hot chocolate with us. That coincidentally is the prime time for bird watching the bird bath and feeders out the bay window. All of the kids would watch for new bird sightings throughout the day while we were weaving our baskets.

We each wove a small place mat and fashioned a reed basket. Some of the baskets were even pretty good. Each of the kids was trying to outdo the others and a lot of good natured chiding went on. These two activities were fun for all and quite productive.

Now before I continue I need to make an important point. Our AT&T safety motto that is ingrained in my bone marrow was: *No activity is so important or urgent that we cannot take time to do our work safely.* My grandkids all know that grandpa is very serious about safety, whether at work or play. They get a safety lesson before any activity that involves a hazard such as in wood carving, chopping, sawing, BB gun shooting, tomahawk and knife throwing and so forth.

I have also been a fairly productive wood carver over the years. I would generally get quite a few of my scouts to meet and pass off requirements for the wood carving merit badge. One time in New Jersey, my troop took top Regional honors in several different competitive activities including; wood carving, orienteering, pioneering, rope and knot tying. See photo. Now back to wildwood. At one of our family get-togethers, we (girls and boys) worked on wood carving merit badge projects. Of course this was preceded by a safety lesson. The girls had a lot of fun and were proud of their carvings. They actually did as well or better than the boys.

Some of the most memorable activities were the treasure hunts. For one hunt I drew a map of our property and included many of the map reading merit badge requirements. Then I laid out a fairly complex compass course. At each azimuth point we hid instructions to the following point. The instructions contained the distance in feet, and compass bearing to the next point. We measured the compass leader's step lengths before they started. They then had to calculate how many steps it would take from one point to the next plus how to read a compass accurately. We also hid a minor prize at each point and then a big prize for each one at the end like a doll for the girls, bow and rubber tipped arrows for the younger boys and compasses for the

older boys. For another hunt we used our map and made up clues which we planted at each succeeding location. They loved those hunts and still talk about them.

The kids still talk about our rocket projects also. We would buy each of them a model rocket plus quite a few rocket motors at Hobby Lobby. We would spend a day or two building the rockets on the deck. Then we would paint them all up and put the decals on them. A lot of bonding went on during this phase and the kids loved it. The exciting day of launch would finally arrive. Grass hoppers were collected to be inserted into the nose capsule. The parachute was folded and tucked away per directions. We set up our launch platform and perimeter in a clear area in the valley. I gave the inevitable safety lesson before commencing. We discussed the wind direction and speed and estimated the slope of the launch rod so that the rocket would drift back and land in our launch vicinity. Each child got to trigger their own rocket lift off. When everything was safe, the group countdown would begin: 10,9,8.....1,- blast off. These rockets would almost disappear several hundred yards into the blue sky. The parachute would unfold at the apogee to the loud shouts of the kids. Then they would take off trying to catch the parachute and rocket before it touched the ground. Sometimes the wind would shift and take it way off the estimated landing. The grasshopper astronaut would then be inspected. Occasionally a rocket would get lost entirely. You had to be there to experience and capture the excitement. See the photo attached.

BB guns can be dangerous but can be loads of fun when used right. Boys and girls all love this activity and it provides an opportunity to educate them on gun handling and safety. I had plenty of experience in the Marine Corps and was an avid hunter throughout my life. I would buy paper targets and set up a safe backstop. Specific distances were set up. The kids could practice all morning. Serious competition got underway after lunch. There were four shooting positions. Three shots were allowed in each of standing, kneeling, sitting and prone positions. A target was scored for each position and a final tally made. This activity carries on today without my involvement. The older kids know the safety rules, set up the gun range and spend hours at it. They have lots of fun at it and have been well educated in gun safety. We wore out one BB gun.

Since childhood I have been intensely interested in mountain man history, lore, black powder guns, throwing knives, tomahawks and have participated in various mountain man rendezvous activities and camp. So another activity that the boys and girls all like is to throw my knives and tomahawks at targets. They all know the safety rules and have fun on their own now.

I like to teach the kids about old pioneer methods of doing things. One afternoon I showed them, with my dad's old logging saws, how the pioneers sawed their wood that was used to cook with and burn for winter heat. A two-man saw requires coordinated team work and timing. Everyone, including the parents, takes a turn and finds it fun, interesting and educational. Many other activities along this line can be conjured up.

One time I nailed a short piece of doweling to a plywood board for a sun dial. See photo. I gave the kids a magic marker. They had to keep track of the time and every hour on the hour they

marked the position and time of the shadow tip. After that, no one was allowed to ask the time as they could read it for themselves on the sundial that they had created.

Wildwood is an extraordinary good place to fly kites. I haven't seen anyone else fly kites here but all of my grand children remember building and flying their kites.

Faye and I both play music and have been directly or indirectly instrumental in all of our children and grandchildren playing various instruments. We have a whole bag of various supporting (noisy) instruments like wooden spoons, harmonicas, penny whistles. The kids all liked to play them when they were younger. I would get my amplifier and microphones out and the kids would take turns performing. Over time most of them have become quite good. We have some pretty good jams on our deck now and enjoy the camaraderie. See photos attached.

Of course everyone knows that fishing at our pond can be fun. Some of the little guys from the "big cities" come back grinning from ear to ear and so excited that they can hardly contain themselves. Of course they have all learned by now that grandma will cook the fish they catch but they have to be cleaned properly before they come in the house. I am an avid fly fisherman and several of the boys have taken this up. I tie all of my own flies and am still waiting for an opportunity to pass along that skill.

Everyone loves to have a campfire at night where we can reminisce, sing camp fire songs, pop popcorn, roast marshmallows, and make smores. We have several astronomy aids. The BSA merit badge book and Field Guide is great for this also. The kids really get into the star gazing. They all look for constellations and satellites and try to compete on who can find them first.

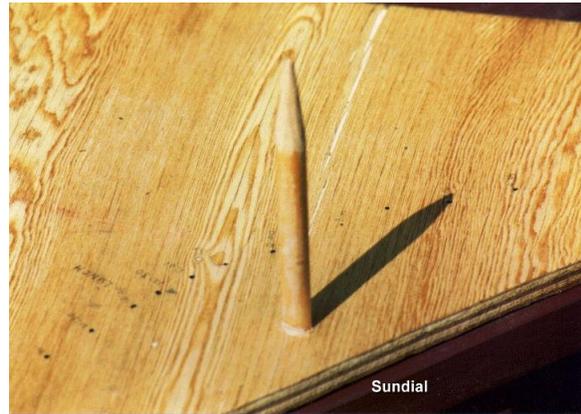
The activities that are available are limited only by your imagination: knot tying, catching butterflies, mop dolls, even reading. The kids themselves will conjure up games of their own, make swords, play pirate, walk on stilts, shoot arrows, build bird houses, and more. You can even get them to help with some maintenance or improvement projects like gathering rocks for a flower garden, trimming around the base of trees and hauling off the slash if you approach them right. My grandchildren all know that a little work is required before play at grandpa and grandma's summer house. Remember the episode where Tom Sawyer made play out of whitewashing the fence and soon had the neighborhood kids paying him to help. There are lots of hints here. Have some Wildwood fun.

Del Bills is a 28 year Wildwood resident; past Board President; retired electrical engineer; long time Boy Scout leader; a rural farming/ranching boyhood heritage; with an intense interest in nature. You can contact him at [www. delbertbills@msn.com](http://www.delbertbills@msn.com).

## FUN ACTIVITIES AT WILDWOOD



Two Happy Campers with Bows and Arrows



Sundial



Rocket Ready with Grasshopper Astronaut



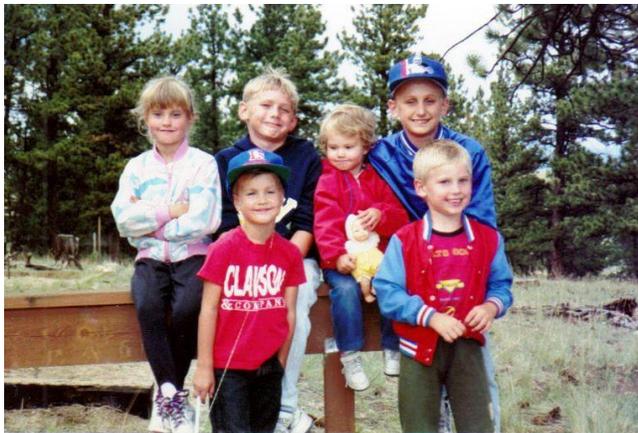
Rocket Launch Day



Mop Dolls



BB gun Competition



Our Treasure Hunters



Horse Shoes



Pumping Water for Seedling Trees



Music Performance

It's Fun for Them. Remember Tom Sawyer.



Andy playing basketball



Swords and Pirates



John Deere, Jeff and Loads of Fun



Andy Building a Bird House



Amphitheater, Picnics, Performances, Friendship



Spencer Swinging



"Little Red Wagon" Ride for Tate



Day is Done—Almost