

Call of the wild: Kids get hooked on camping in classes for families

By Kansas City Star, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.09.15

Word Count 811

Level 1040L



The Minter family, including (from left) Tessa, 8, Ron, Isaac, 6, and Kelly, practice setting up a tent at their home in Kansas City, Missouri, June 9, 2015. The Minters participated earlier this month in Learn2 Camp at Weston Bend State Park. The program, sponsored by Missouri State Parks, teaches the basics of family camping. Allison Long/Kansas City Star/TNS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Tessa, 8, and Isaac, 6, didn't want to leave Missouri's Weston Bend State Park. The Minters were barely out of the park when the kids began begging for a return trip.

They'd spent the day catching bugs and on scavenger hunts as part of Missouri State Parks' Learn2 Camp program. It wasn't enough, though, for nature's newest fans. They wanted another night to roast marshmallows and sing "I've Been Workin' On The Railroad" around a campfire - and soon.

That's exactly what Missouri State Parks wants to hear.

Camping permit sales in Missouri's parks dropped 13 percent between 2000 and 2013, the most recent year for which camping numbers were available. National parks have been dealing with a decline in overnight stays since the 1980s. Nowadays, visitors seem to prefer the comfort of nearby motels.

Tents, Campfires And Animal Tracks

The Learn2 Camp program works to ease families who haven't camped before into the outdoors. The program brings them out to a park for a weekend and provides equipment and organized activities, said Stephanie Deidrick. She is a spokeswoman for Missouri State Parks.

They were shown things like how to pitch a tent or how to cook over a campfire. Deidrick said she hopes it will make it so that "families will be more likely to camp on their own in the future."

Deidrick said that getting kids into camping early can increase the chances they'll camp as adults.

The program was exactly what Kelly Minter had hoped for when she applied.

She and her husband Ron already had agreed to their kids' longtime pleas for a camping trip. They had set one up to Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park for the end of June.

Kelly Minter had camped with her family as a child. However, she said she preferred taking her own kids to Oceans of Fun, a theme park in Kansas City. It was less work than preparing a campsite.

After the camping trip was planned, she was worried. What if her ideas and her husband's various "theories" about how to start a fire or set up a tent wouldn't match real life?

This year's Learn2 Camp at Weston Bend was the perfect test run.

With the help of park employees, Ron Minter figured out how to put up a large six-person tent. Isaac and Tessa learned how to identify various trees, insects and animal tracks. Ron Minter got instructions on using sticks to start a campfire. No more lighter fluid and starter logs for him, his wife hopes.

"I think we might be camping more," Kelly Minter said.

Drop In Overnight Camping Trips

According to the Outdoor Foundation's most recent "American Camper Report," 40.1 million Americans went camping in 2013 - a drop of about 424,000 from 2012 and a decline of 6.1 million from 2009.

National parks hosted nearly 11.9 million overnight visits in 1981, according to the National Park Service. That number had shrunk to 8.8 million by 2000, a 26 percent difference.

National Park Service spokesman Jeffrey Olson said the way Americans experience parks changed in the last 30 years. Attendance numbers reached an all-time high last year, but people are not spending the night as often.

Visitors now have more overnight options, including staying in nearby towns.

"They have a lot more in the way of services for visitors, like motel rooms and seats in restaurants. Some people love to spend the night near national parks and then get up and go after breakfast in the morning," Olson said.

Famous parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite are still full every weekend and require making reservations well in advance, Olson said. Camping numbers, however, may never get back to the

highs of the 1980s.

The decline in camping may be more tied to Americans spending less time away from work than any lack of equipment and training.

In the 2014 "American Camper" survey, 71 percent of people gave "more free time or vacation time" as a reason that they would continue camping.

Creating "A Legacy" Of Camping

But the Learn2 Camp program does try to take advantage of one promising fact.

Among campers asked in the 2013 survey, 85 percent took their first trip before they turned 16. After that key age, any chance of a person going camping decreases quite a bit.

Missouri State Parks knows this well.

Exposing families with children to camping when they're younger can start an outdoor tradition for them that may continue for generations, Deidrick said.

Chi Kim, who came to Weston Bend with her husband and three children, agreed. She grew up camping in Colorado.

"I think you are passing on a legacy by coming out here and getting them into camping and the outdoors. Just like anything else, you've got to expose them to it and teach them about it," she said.

Quiz

- 1 Which paragraph in the introduction [paragraphs 1-4] BEST shows that the Learn2 Camp program may be working?

- 2 Which of the following details explains why fewer people are camping in national parks?
 - (A) Visitors now have more overnight options, including staying in nearby towns.
 - (B) Attendance numbers reached an all-time high last year, but people are not spending the night as often.
 - (C) National Park Service spokesman Jeffrey Olson said the way Americans experience parks changed in the last 30 years.
 - (D) Famous parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite are still full every weekend and require making reservations well in advance, Olson said.

- 3 Which paragraph in the section "Creating A Legacy Of Camping" BEST summarizes a central idea of the article?

- 4 What is the central idea of the section "Tents, Campfires And Animal Tracks"?
 - (A) Preparing a campsite is a lot of work.
 - (B) Park employees know a lot about camping.
 - (C) Families who have never been camping before love to learn to camp.
 - (D) Teaching families camping skills will help them be able to camp on their own.