

# Rendezvous on the Prairie

By Kelly Ulrick, Saylorville Lake

Ever wonder what the settlers saw when they first arrived in the Midwest? It was a different landscape than we see today.

Iowa was once a sea of grass. About 85 percent of Iowa was covered by tall-grass prairie. Big bluestem would have been a common site. It's one of the tallest grasses, reaching eight-foot high.

On Oct. 7, Saylorville Lake celebrated Iowa's prairie heritage in the authentic 200-year-old setting.

"Well, it may be difficult fer you to picture settl'rs crossing the endless prairie or the great bison on the plains, but stick with me and I can tell a tale of covered wagons, fur traders and a gooseberry pie taint n'ver ferget," said Michael Coltrain, Saylorville Lake, as he portrayed a wagon-train salesman at the Red Feather Festival.

This annual family event invites visitors to meet pioneers of the past, step inside a tipi to hear Native American Indian stories, and try their hand at old-pioneer games.

Park rangers, dressed in 1890's attire, took folks on guided hikes through the prairie to learn about native prairie plants, animals and current management plans for the 170-acre Red Feather Prairie.

Prairie habitat is important to both people and wildlife. Historically, people have depended on prairie plants and wildlife for food, medicines and materials. Perhaps the greatest legacy of the prairie is the fertile soil, which has become the basis for Iowa's economy.

The landscape of Iowa has undergone a drastic change in the past 150 years. Of the 30-million acres of prairie that covered Iowa at the time of settlement, only one tenth of one percent remains today. When we lose prairie, our feel for Iowa history is also lost.

Red Feather Prairie was the original borrow site for the Saylorville dam. Poor soil conditions made reforestation unfeasible.

The Corps of Engineers began the Red Feather prairie reconstruction project in 1981. Red Feather is Iowa's second largest restored prairie at 170 acres. The Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge is now the largest restored prairie with over 5,000 acres.

Red Feather has approximately 10 species of grasses and over 40 species of Forbess. Saylorville park rangers manage the prairie by burning or haying on a 4-year rotation. The prairie is Saylorville's richest birding area with approximately 142 species,



Photo by Kelly Ulrick, park ranger at Saylorville Lake  
Michael Coltrain, park ranger at Saylorville Lake, attempts to sell some of his wares as he portrays a wagon-train salesman at the Red Feather Festival.

including nesting Henslows' sparrows, bluebirds and bobolinks.

During the Red Feather Festival, visitors are transported back in time as they ride through the tall grass into a trading camp on a horse-drawn wagon.

The festival comes alive with the old-time music of the Talking Fiddle Heads, who use a fiddle, a washtub, a washboard, and a string guitar for instruments.

This year's cold weather kept participants close to the campfires through most of the events. They had a chance to learn how to start a fire with flint and steel and see if they could identify the kitchen tools of the 1800's.

An authentic replica of a Conestoga wagon was hauled into the prairie from Living History Farms. Several buck skinners set up wall tents where they demonstrated how to carve re-curve bows, spin and weave cloth and sew leather moccasins.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Polk County Conservation Board sponsor the Red Feather Festival. The festival uses more than 30 volunteers and has participation, during the week, by five different school districts. Nearly 1,000 school children spent a day at the prairie chasing insects, churning butter and studying the fur pelts of Iowa mammals.

The Red Feather Festival is one of the many ways the Corps is encouraging outdoor enthusiasts to be better stewards of the land. 🌱

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- Michael Coltrain

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# RUB-A-DUB-DUB

By Petty Officer 1st Class M. C. Mercado, Naval Hospital Pensacola

## *Hand Washing Can Be a Matter of Life and Death*



For most people, hand washing is a subconscious act that takes place after using the bathroom or before a meal. But proper hand washing can really be a matter of life or death.

Hungarian doctor Ignaz Semmelweis first recognized the importance of hand washing as a means of infection control while working at a hospital in Vienna, Austria, during the 1800s.

Semmelweis noticed an alarming number of healthy, new mothers dying within days after giving birth.

He discovered that student-doctors working in the morgue were also treating the women. However, the doctors were not washing their hands. Semmelweis suspected they were spreading germs from the dead to the new mothers and insisted that they begin a practice of washing their

hands before treating patients.

After educating the doctors of his findings, and incorporating regular hand washing practices between patients, Semmelweis saw the mortality rate of the maternity ward drop dramatically.

Though times have changed and medicine has advanced greatly, the Association for Professionalism in Infection Control and Epidemiology maintains that hand washing remains the most powerful defense against infections.

"Germs are all around us and come in different forms," says Veronica Hagann, infection control coordinator at Naval Hospital Pensacola.

Germs from other people can linger anywhere; the office phone, door handles, shopping baskets, money, even the button you push when you call for an elevator.

These are items people touch and each time they do, they leave their germs and take away others.

"This is how a lot of common illnesses are spread," continues Hagann. "Airborne viruses include tuberculosis and measles, which are released into the air when an infected person exhales or coughs. Droplet viruses, caused by sneezing and coughing include

meningitis, pneumonia and the flu. Contact illnesses include staph infections, food poisoning, pink eye, chicken pox, and colds," said Hagann.

You can unknowingly come in contact with these germs. One simple rub of the eye or bite of a sandwich using unwashed hands can introduce any of a number of illnesses into your body. The odds of you or your family catching any of these are greatly reduced simply by washing your hands, according to Hagan.

Handwashing removes dirt, organic material and transient microorganisms. The most important element is friction.

You need to rub your hands together with soap for 10 to 15 seconds to loosen up the grit and germs and then rinse.

"It is not the soap that kills the germs," said Hagan. "It is the act of rubbing the

hands that loosens the germs and rinsing washes the germs away."

It is important to wash your hands regularly throughout the day. After cleaning the house, petting a dog or returning from an outing, it is important to wash away the germs that you have accumulated on your hands. It especially needs to be done before cooking or eating.

"In general, normal healthy human skin acts as a barrier to keep germs out. Dry or cracked hands have less resistance to germs. If you have cracks or cuts in your skin, germs have access into your body," said Hagan. 🏠

**On the Internet**

<http://www.washup.org/>

