"Grasslanders" Learn of Ecology & Ranching

ERF’s Wild About the Grasslands! ranching heritage and ecology program returned to the Empire Ranch this summer. Seventeen middle school students were part of the excitement during this week in the "wild," June 16-20. The week began with learning to use the naturalists’ tools contained in their expedition daypacks. Then, before they could say “fun in the sun,” they were off on a hike down the Heritage Discovery Trail.

During the week they engaged in orienteering and geocaching at Oak Tree Canyon, and learned about mural painting and nature sketching. They took many hikes to identify birds, animal scat, and cast animal tracks. Much to their surprise they discovered tracks of a mountain lion and a Great Blue Heron. They ventured to a remote area on Las Cienegas to use geospatial technology in science investigations and a wet/dry water monitoring project.

Guest leaders used humor and stories to teach students about ranch history, had fun in the mud with them as they made adobe bricks, introduced a Harris’ Hawk and the basics of falconry and raptor study, demonstrated the art of “branding” on old pieces of wood, and led them in a ground surface survey of areas treated in the recent prescribed burn. On the final day, parents and family members attended an ice cream social celebration and the unveiling of the mural, Empire Ranch in the Heart of the LCNCA: Past, Present, and Future. What an incredible week it was for all!

(continued on p. 2)
I Am The Empire

This is dedicated to all who have lived and worked on the Empire Ranch and made it what it is today.

Look around and what do you see?
Rolling open spaces, a creek, and some trees.
A beautiful land out here in the west,
You may not believe it, but it's some of the best.
First, let me introduce myself, while I still have the chance,
Before my story begins, howdy, I'm Empire Ranch.
I've been here forever, since Creation, I know,
But in more recent history, I really start to show.
When 1870 rolled around,
Edward Nye Fish bought this bountiful ground,
For six years he stayed and cared for me,
Ranching his cattle and helping make what you see.

Then three men - Hislop, Harvey, and Vail,
Purchased me for two grand when I went on sale.
They added more rooms and continued to build,
Both family and livestock, with these I was filled.
Soon a new company, they had created,
Empire Land and Cattle Co., they named it.
Then Southern Pacific Railroad rates began their ascent,
So on a cattle drive to California, all the cowboys went.
For the next 32 years the Vails kept me alive,
During this time, I grew tremendous in size.
But, in 1928, the Vails sold me to Boice,
He and his partners sure made a good choice.
The Chiricahua Cattle Co. took great care of me.
Frank Boice moved in and here raised his family.
He and Mary were sole owners, starting in 1951,
My house was modernized, but renovations were far from done.

Then just a year later, I changed hands again,
Though Anamax Mining didn't buy me for my land.
They wanted my water, they wanted to mine,
And they thought that I was the perfect find.
But when Anamax came in, the Boices went out,
The cattle were sold when their lease ran out.
When nothing became of their mining scheme,
I was leased again, with the Donaldsons I was teamed.
When the owners changed again, the Donaldsons stayed,
Though they moved off my land, they worked here during the day.
In 1988, the Bureau of Land Management came,
Conserving my land was their primary aim.

In 1997, a new foundation began,
That wanted to help more than just my land.
They wanted to keep my history alive,
So future generations could see how I survived.
So they started repairs and spread the word,
'Bout the history and importance of my owners and herds.
The Empire Ranch Foundation received 95 grand,
To help preserve and restore my house and my land.
So, as you can see, I am more than just a ranch,
I have history and want to live, so give me a chance.
Don't let me die, don't forget my past,
Keep history alive, please, help me last.

Written by Laura A. W. Wheat,
February 2008
- Cadette/Senior Girl Scout Troop 1224, Sierra Vista, Arizona
- Girl Scout Gold Award Project

"Grasslanders" (cont. from p. 1)
The spark that ignited an appreciation of the outdoors and ranching culture last summer continues to burn brightly in the lives of these children! We are enormously grateful to the many expert volunteers who made the event possible, and for seven generous tuition scholarships provided by the: Anne C. Stradling Equine Foundation, Arizona Rangers-Sonoita Company, Fred Baker, Headquarters West, Ltd., Patagonia Elementary Parent Teacher Club, and the Patagonia-Sonoita Rotary. With their help, and the financial support of ERF members and BLM, Wild About the Grasslands! and other educational initiatives will continue make a difference for our children and youth.
Legacy Day 2008

A record number of 70 students from Elgin Middle School attended our annual Legacy Day event this year. They were greeted with an engaging talk about the history of the Empire Ranch and the daily life of today's cowboys. Next, four experienced ropers provided roping lessons and encouragement. Intense concentration prevailed as students learned the proper way of coiling a lasso to avoid tangling their ropes as they attempted to rope a target.

Another class, Dutch-oven cooking by the campfire, was taught by two outstanding ranch cooks. There were plenty of doughy, sticky hands to be seen as each student made biscuits. Needless to say the newly baked biscuits were consumed on the spot and never made it to the hearty Dutch oven cowboy lunch served for everyone at noontime.

Following lunch, students constructed an adobe wall from the bricks they made. Again, hands were soiled--not by flour but by mud. The day-long event closed with everyone feeling a greater appreciation of the ranch life experienced over the years here on the Empire Ranch. Thanks to all of the volunteers and instructors, it was a fun and uniquely educational day for all.

Preservation Progress on Many Fronts

ERF Board members and BLM staff attended a briefing meeting on May 2, 2008 at which the preliminary results of the structural/seismic evaluation of the Ranch House, Adobe Hay Barn, Hired Man's House, and Grove house were presented. Project engineer Mel Green noted that the four buildings examined are not hazardous, although in an earthquake their structural integrity might be severely compromised. Generally, height to thickness ratio of walls and integrity roof/wall connections determines stability. The height to thickness ratio of the walls meets standards; however, in most cases the roof is not connected to the walls. This situation should be remedied as other preservation work is undertaken on the buildings.

A draft of the final report of the evaluation was submitted by Statistical Research Inc., ERF's preservation contractor, and reviewed by the Preservation Committee in June. The draft report was used by BLM and ERF at its July 19th planning meeting to set preservation priorities for the coming year, which includes initiating permanent repair of the zaguan lintel.

Volunteer work days in April and June included recontouring the soil between the Heritage Trail and the Hired Man's House to be sure water drains away from the House and preparing the Headquarters buildings for the monsoons by cleaning gutters and drains. General clean-up; testing of electrical outlets and wires; removal of several modern additions, including metal furniture, modular shelving, and hazardous plumbing pipes; and moving the heavy safe in the office to relieve pressure on the west wall and floor were also accomplished.

A team of Girl Scouts from Sierra Vista painted realistic window panes on the plywood added by BLM over the doors and windows of the Field House as a safety measure while future uses of the building are being considered. The plans for the corral repairs are complete and will be undertaken as soon as historic lumber is obtained. Please plan to join us at the next volunteer day on October 18th; call (888) 364-2829 for more information.

When Horses are Teachers

Can a historic ranch contribute to the well-being of modern-day children? Some 25 kids from the Tohono O'odham Nation would testify that it certainly can. In May, the Empire Ranch hosted a three day "Advanced Horse Camp." Camp director Silas Johnson, a traditional leader and teacher on the Tohono O'odham Nation west of Tucson, explains: "Horse camps teach children responsibility and promote holistic healing. Although there is plenty of adult supervision, it is the horses who are the teachers and the therapists."

Horses and ranching have been part of O'odham culture since the late 17th century.

(continued on page 4)
Horse Camp (cont’d from p. 3)

In April, the Bureau of Land Management-Tucson Field Office and the Empire Ranch Foundation were awarded $4,800 from the "Take It Outside: Children and Nature Initiative" (TIO) program. This national BLM program was established to encourage children and their families to spend more time outdoors on the public lands, and to encourage and develop stewardship of the public lands. The TIO funding will launch ERF’s Geospatial Technology for Outdoor Recreation and Stewardship project developed by Gail Corkill, our Outdoor Education Program Director, in collaboration with Netzin Steklis, Conservation Scientist and Ecology Educator.

"Take It Outside!"

The Empire Ranch Foundation deeply appreciates recent donations received in memory of:  
Rex Allen  
John Paul Andree  
Pete & Clorene Bidegain  
Earl F. Glenn, Jr.  
Laura (Dusty) Vail Ingram  
Ferne Kemp Lewis  
Charles Putnam  
Julia Scribner Ruch  
Bill Schulmeyer  
Goldfrey Sill  
Lyle & Dorothy Strung  
Al & Russ Vail  
Edward N. Vail

and in appreciation of:  
Marion Hyland  
Annalyn Watt  
Karen Wyatt

Gifts in Remembrance

The project’s aim is to introduce middle school students, ages 11-14 years, to geospatial technology by learning to use global positioning system (GPS) units and geographic information systems (GIS). Students will work with BLM biologists to collect data for resource monitoring, create a map of special points of interest on the LCNCA, and develop an outdoor recreation information field guide.

Benefits will extend to participants of ERF’s successful Wild About the Grasslands! program, the Equipment Loan Program funded by the Patagonia Regional Community Foundation, and children and their families attending other ERF and BLM education programs at Empire Ranch.

Working Calendar

[Location: Empire Ranch Headquarters, unless otherwise noted.]

August
16 Volunteer Work Day, 8am-Noon
September
20 ERF Board Meeting, 9am-Noon
October
18 Volunteer Work Day, 8am-Noon
November
1 2008 Roundup Open House: “Cowboy Life on the Empire Ranch” 10am-4pm
15 ERF Board Meeting and election of officers, 9am-Noon
December
3 Entries due for Empire 100 Art Show
January 2009
15 Empire 100 Art Show - Members & Friends Reception, 4pm-7:30pm
(Show runs through March 13)

2008/2009 Membership Reply

Yes, I want to help save the Empire Ranch for future generations!

Name:  
(Please enter name(s) in your preferred format for acknowledgments.)

Street/P.O. Address: ________________________________

City, State, ZIP: _____________________________________

Phone: (____)____________________    Email:  _______________________________

☐ Check enclosed    ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa Card ☐ This is a new address

_________________________    __________   ____________________________
Card Number     Exp.Date.    Signature

☐ This donation is also in __memory/__appreciation of __________________________

☐ Please add me to your listing to receive email updates and e-newsletters

☐ This is a gift membership from: __________________________________________

Please Mail To: Empire Ranch Foundation, P.O. Box 842, Sonoita, AZ  85637

The Empire Ranch Foundation has an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit classification; donations are tax-deductible as allowed by law.

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