



**(Above)** Learn2 staff help tackle one of the first tasks of the day by assisting campers as they set up tents at their campsites.

**(Right)** Learning about dutch oven cooking and helping to make a tasty dessert are just a couple of the experiences campers have during the Learn2 camps.

**(Opposite page)** Camp participants learn from park staff about properly respecting wildlife while camping.



DNR photo by Christy Pick

# Learn2!

Never camped? Never paddled? Never fear.

by Tom Uhlenbrock

Enjoying the outdoors is the goal of the Learn2 programs offered by Missouri State Parks, a division of the Department of Natural Resources, at sites throughout the state.

The staff at participating parks offer training on camping, paddling and other activities, with the programs tailored for individuals and families with little or no experience in the outdoors. Often, parents' only real experience is what they "learned" as a child on family outings. As adult mentors, they realize those experiences often require specialized skills.

"If they've never done it before, we show them how," said Steve Bost, the interpretive resource specialist at Montauk State Park near Salem, which offers Learn2 Camp programs at its campgrounds along the Current River.

Tents, stoves, kitchen kits, sleeping pads and other camping equipment are

provided for the weekend through a partnership with The North Face under its "Explore Your Parks" program, which is active in more than a dozen states.

In addition to loaning equipment, the program gives campers an activity guide with information on hiking, biking, camping, paddling and playing in parks close to metropolitan areas.

Participants also receive an "Outdoor Exploration Guide: Camping 101" that has a camper gear checklist, Leave No Trace principles, outdoor cooking recipes, hiking information and a safety checklist and activities for kids.

Participants apply online at [mostateparks.com](http://mostateparks.com) and are asked to write why they should be considered for a Learn2 program.

Campers pay \$13, which is the same as the basic state park camping fee, and in return receive a coupon for their next



DNR photos by Scott Myers



camping trip to a Missouri park. Upon completion of the program, participants receive a discount coupon good at The North Face store locations.

The first day begins with setting up camp and ends with s'mores around the campfire. Park staff are present to answer any questions.

"We show them how to set up a tent, how to arrange a campsite," Bost said. "They learn different techniques for building a fire, how to build a fire when it's raining, and how to cook on an open fire."

Bost conducts nature talks and leads hikes. His advice ranges from simple topics, like hiking safety, to more complicated subjects like how to hook a tasty trout.

Trail maps are distributed so the participants can enjoy the park, and the program ends with campsite cleanup and equipment packing.

The participants then are free to



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– Steve Bost, interpretive resource specialist, Montauk State Park

spend their last day exploring the park, and practicing what they have learned.

“Knowledge is real important,” said Bost. “We want to make their camping trip more enjoyable, so they can have a good time in the outdoors.

“They all said the same thing, hands down, that they were definitely going to come back again. They left with big smiles on their faces.”

**D**uring 2013, there were 77 people who participated in the Learn2 Camp programs at five state parks. Sessions were held at Robertsville, Trail of Tears, Montauk and Weston Bend state parks and Arrow Rock State Historic Site.

Learn2 Paddle programs allow visitors to learn more about kayaking in Missouri State Parks. In 2013, 272 people signed up for



(Opposite page, top) Campers also have a chance to enjoy the campfire staple, s’mores.

(Opposite page, bottom) During a Learn2 camp at Weston Bend State Park, campers enjoy a program focused on enjoying the night sky.

(Above) Fire building and outdoor cooking are just two of the essential skills needed for camping outdoors. Both are taught during the Learn2 Camp.

(Left) Hands-on experience is one of the main approaches that Learn2 staff take when teaching.

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(Above) Paddling is taught during the Learn2 Paddle program at Wakonda State Park's 160-acre Agate Lake. (Below) Campers learn about some of the wonders of the outdoors during an afternoon demonstration at Weston Bend State Park.



DNR photo by Scott Myers



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classes in six state parks. The parks with Learn2 Paddle programs were Wappapello, Crowder, Cuivre River, Wakonda, Stockton and Finger Lakes. The programs are free, and reservations are required.

**K**yle Scott, the natural resource manager at Wakonda State Park, has taught Learn2 Paddle sessions the past two summers. The park in the northeast corner of the state features six lakes that make it perfect for water recreation. Paddling sessions are taught on the 160-acre Agate Lake. The park has its own kayaks, paddles and floatation vests that are loaned to participants.

“We had three sessions each day, with an average of eight to 10 people per session, with two instructors,” Scott said. “It starts on dry land. We go over the parts of a kayak, different types of kayaks and paddles, and how to properly use safety devices, like floatation vests.”

Scott and the other instructors at the park received certification training on flat-water kayaking from the American Canoe Association. Wakonda State Park has a rental fleet of sit-on-top kayaks, where the floater sits on an open seat of molded plastic rather than enclosed in a cockpit.

“Once we familiarize everybody with the kayaks, we put them in the water and go over a few strokes, then basically do a tour out onto the lake,” Scott said. “We give

them the opportunity to flip the kayaks over and do a re-entry, if they want to do that.”

The occasional mishap is expected, but not a problem in the calm water of the shallow lake, Scott said.

“I had a lady one year who was terrified,” he said. “I told her how hard it was to flip over the kayak. She got in and flipped it right over. But she was three feet from the bank, and got right back in and had a really good time.”

Six Girl Scouts from Troop 5189 took part in a Learn2 Paddle session last July at Wakonda and “had a blast,” said their leader, Gail Mast.

“The park ranger was a lot of fun,” Mast said of Kyle Scott. “He taught them safety, they went out on the water, and stopped and swam at a beach for a little while. Kyle was laid back and allowed them just to have a good time with it.”

“A couple of dads and a few brothers also took the class with them. They all learned a ton. If anybody dumped, they dumped on purpose.”

For more information on the Learn2 series held in Missouri state parks and historic sites, visit [mostateparks.com](http://mostateparks.com). 



**Learn2 staff introduce participants to the basics of camping and serve as guides throughout the experience.**

*Tom Uhlenbrock is a writer for Missouri State Parks, a division of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.*