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TRAILBLAZER

Oregon Ridge Nature Center & Park Council
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Oregon Ridge Park and Nature Center are facilities of the Baltimore County Dept. of Recreation and Parks

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Oregon Ridge Nature Center & Park Council
13555 Beaver Dam Road
Cockeysville, Maryland 21030



FEBRUARY/ MARCH 2008

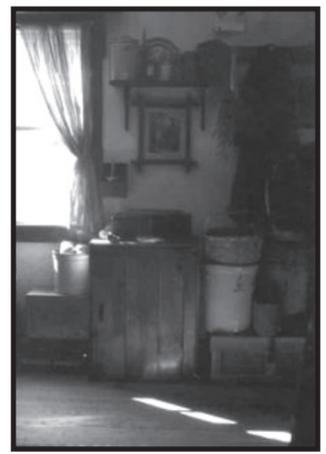
MAPLE SUGAR SEASON 2008 Will It Be Cold Enough?

It's that busy time of year when the ORNC staff taps the maples, affixes sap buckets to the tree trunks, runs tubing from neighboring trees, and then waits nervously to see if Mother Nature will cooperate.

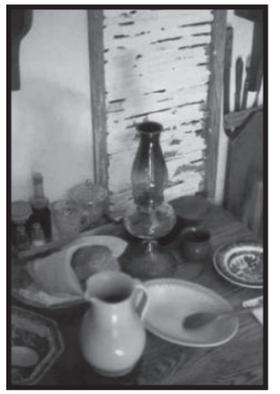
Since our first Maple Sugar Season back in the early 80's, weather changes have affected the collection of sap. Back then there were three weeks of sap collecting beginning in mid-February. The cold nights cooperated with above freezing daytime temperatures to produce an abundance of sweet sap to boil down into tasty syrup to the delight of visitors. However, as the earth has warmed over the years, the amount of sap collected has dwindled, the nights remaining too warm to allow the sap to rise. So it is with trepidation that the naturalists begin this season. What will February 2008 bring?

Whatever the temperatures, we will make sure our visitors learn the physiology of tree sap, how to tap a maple and collect sap, and the evaporation process required to make syrup. So please join us on February 16, 17, 23 and 24 for a refreshing hike to the sugar bush and back to the Sugar Shack where we will be making delicious maple syrup. And just maybe we will have some of the white stuff on the ground so we can make maple taffy in the snow.

Maple Sugar Days at Oregon Ridge is free and a special way to welcome spring with family and friends. And don't forget to join in our celebration of the season's end at our Annual Pancake Breakfast on March 1 and 2 at the Oregon Ridge Lodge. A small fee of \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children will provide a feast of homemade pancakes smothered in real maple syrup, grilled sausage, OJ, coffee and milk. There will be fun raffles of all kinds, flower sales, live music, gift shop items, and a chance to chat with new and old friends.



Peter Goff Archaeology Museum



EXPLORING THE BURIED PAST OF OREGON RIDGE: "Can You Dig It?"

Dr. George Brauer, PhD
March 17, 7:30 PM

It is difficult looking at Oregon Ridge today to conceive what life was like for people 150 years ago. Once could be heard the Irish twang in the shouts of workers, mauls striking chisels in the marble quarry, and the smell of noxious sulphur fumes spreading across the meadow. Today we hear the calls of wild birds and the shouts of children exploring and discovering nature. On March 17, 2008, at 7:30 PM, Oregon Ridge Nature Center's Archaeologist George Brauer will present a slide narrated program on the history of Oregon Ridge. Based on 20 years of historical and archaeological research, Dr. Brauer will share his interpretations of what life was like for town residents during the mid-19th century.

Dr. Brauer began his career as a social studies teacher in the Baltimore County Public Schools. He pursued graduate work in anthropology, history, and geography. In 1984, he initiated a program of historical and archaeological research at the Oregon Ridge Nature Center for students in the Baltimore County Public Schools. Since its inception the program has received numerous awards from both the educational and archaeological communities.

IT'S SUGAR TIME!

Sugar Time begins with

MAPLE SUGAR DAYS

February 16, 17, 23 and 24
Between 10 AM and 4 PM

It's Free! You'll learn how to tap trees,
collect sap, and make maple syrup.

Sugar Time culminates at our

ANNUAL PANCAKE BREAKFAST

March 1 and 2
Between 8 AM and noon
at the Oregon Ridge Lodge

\$5/adult; \$2.50/children 2 - 8



MUSIC IN THE WOODS:
Traditional Music Day

MAY 10, from 10 AM to 4 PM

A Day to Demonstrate, Educate, and Entertain

IT'S FREE!

This year will be our second annual *Music in the Woods* traditional and folk music event, and we're searching for amateur and professional traditional musicians who are willing to voluntarily demonstrate, educate, and entertain the public with their instruments of choice. This includes the fiddle, banjo, mandolin, dulcimer, auto-harp, and other wooden or string instruments (no heavy metal or brass). We're also *hoping* to have clogging, contra, and other traditional dancers participate and provide a dancing workshop. We want you! Everyone in the community is welcome!

Music in the Woods will take place Saturday, May 10th from 10 AM to 4 PM, with a rain date of Sunday May 11th. Events include workshops to build cardboard dulcimers and other instruments, instrument swaps, "Meet an Instrument" sessions,



an instrument building area for kids, face painting, didgeridoos handmade by ORNC staff, local instrument makers selling their crafts, jam sessions, local group performances, a dance workshop, and food provided by the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council. Musical performances should be within the tradition of folk, ballad, and other timeless forms of music written here or in the old country, as well as original contemporary compositions.

The only pre-requisite to participating is the love of music and the desire to share knowledge. If you, or anyone you know, are interested in becoming part of this traditional music celebration, please call Kirk Dreier or Courtney Peed at 410-887-1815 to sign up to perform or just to learn more about the event. You can also visit our website for updated information.

Music in the Woods is a free, public event. Music lovers everywhere are encouraged to come and learn about traditional music and instruments, and to enjoy the entertainment.

New This Year to MUSIC IN THE WOODS

There will be specific times for children to play and/or children and adults to play. Please call to sign up for a time slot. You can also sign up on the day of the event.

Do You Build Instruments?

We're looking for YOU! Please bring your instruments to sell or display. There is no table fee this year. We simply want to have you and your instruments at *Music in the Woods*.

**CARDBOARD DULCIMER WORKSHOP
AT MUSIC IN THE WOODS!**

At this year's *Music In the Woods* you can join a workshop to learn to build a cardboard dulcimer. Although technically made out of paper, don't let that fool you. They have a sweet sound and are quite durable. The plus side of this workshop is that you can build this instrument in half a day and learn to tune and play it from an experienced instructor who also teaches you some songs.

The sounds of the Mountain or Lap Dulcimer have been heard echoing throughout the Appalachian Mountains for over 200 years! Join us for a rollicking good time and build your own. The cost is \$35.00 for the kit. Call 410-887-1815 to sign up. **Registration ends April 11.**



SAVE THE BAY WITH YOUR TAX RETURN

By simply redirecting an amount of your choice on your tax return, you can help save the Chesapeake Bay and protect Maryland's Non-game and Endangered Species. Before putting that stamp on your tax return, please fill in the lines indicated on these tax forms: Line 37 on Maryland Form 502 (residents); Line 13 on Maryland Form 503 (short form for residents); Line 46 on Maryland Form 515 (non-residents). Your donation is deducted from your refund or added to your tax payment, and is tax-deductible the following year. It's so simple to SAVE.

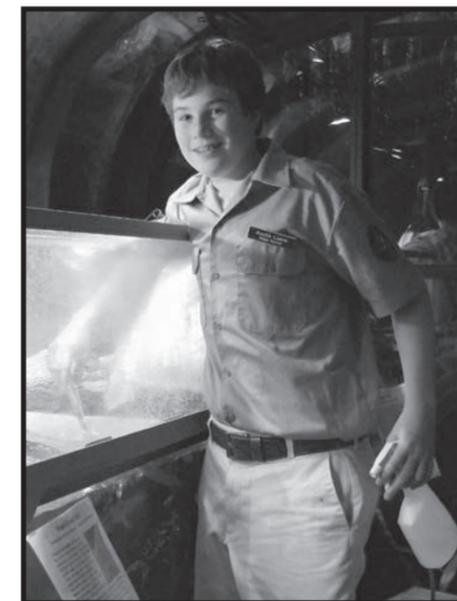
**AUSTIN LUERA:
Ridge Runner with the Right Stuff**

Austin Luera joined the corps of Ridge Runners fairly recently but has already shown that he has the right stuff. Austin was visiting the Center one day with his cousin and noticed the poster about the Ridge Runner program. "I thought it would be cool," he said after he read what Ridge Runners do here. Becoming a Ridge Runner also meshed with his long-term plans. He wants to be a naturalist in the future or work at a job that allows him to stay close to nature. Austin is a quick study, catching on speedily to his duties, and even helped us recruit his long time buddy, Vlad Ward, to the Ridge Runner team.

Austin's favorite animal here at ORNC is the deer mouse. And believe it or not, his favorite Ridgie job is cleaning Jimmy the Opossum's cage. When asked why he favored this particularly dirty job, he responded, "Because I get to pick up Jimmy." But overall his favorite thing about being a Ridge Runner is "...helping all the animals and teaching kids."

Austin is in the 8th grade at Loyola Blakefield and is a member of the Honors Society 2007. His interest in science is topped only by his love of sports. He plays lacrosse for his school and his local recreation league. He loves any activity that takes him outside in nature. He has been on some turkey hunts to observe and sit in trees, but he has never actually participated in the hunt. However, he does hunt squirrels. Austin also enjoys Motocross (dirt biking), but just for fun, not competition.

We are glad Austin found his way here and look forward to working with him for the next four years in our Ridge Runner teen volunteer program. **MJS**



JOIN THE RIDGE RUNNER TEAM!

Ridge Runners are a unique group of teens between the ages of 14 and 17 who share a love of nature and caring for animals, and who enjoy volunteering here because it is different. If you like animals and are looking for something unusual to do, please call Courtney Peed or Kirk Dreier (410-887-1815) to schedule an interview. Ridge Runners volunteer one or more days a week, either after school or on weekends, to clean cages, feed animals, and share information with visitors. They also help out with special events including the Maple Sugar Season and the Pancake Breakfast, Music in the Woods, Primitive Technology Weekend, and the Honey Harvest. And every couple of months they go on an adventure such as a canoe trip on the Chesapeake Bay. Sound like fun? Join the team!

CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL

Is your membership current? Your label will tell you. Next to your name sits a bold letter and a date. "C" means current, "E" means expired, and "X" means this is your last mailing unless you renew now. The date is your membership expiration date. We still need your support. So please renew now, or if you are a current member, give the membership form below to a friend who may enjoy the activities and exhibits here at Oregon Ridge Nature Center.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____ State _____ Zip _____

- \$15 Individual
- \$20 Family
- \$12 Senior Citizens/Students
- \$25 Non-profit organization
- \$50 Sustaining member
- \$100 Corporate member
- \$100 Patron member
- \$150 Lifetime member



Checks payable to ORNC Council, 13555 Beaver Dam Rd., Cockeysville, MD 21030



Oregon Ridge Nature Center and Park Council Scholarship Fund

Each year the Council awards \$1,000 scholarships to college-bound high school seniors from Baltimore County and City. Recipients should show a high level of commitment to the health of the environment and plan to continue their studies in environmental science and nature education.

This year our goal is to support at least two \$2000 scholarships.

We hope you will help by giving generously to this year's Scholarship Fund

To make a tax-deductible donation, send a check made payable to **ORNC Council** and specify on the note line "Scholarship Fund." Send it to:

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council
13555 Beaver Dam Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030

We will publish a scholarship awards program with the names of all donors, so if you would like to make a gift in the name of another, please specify the donor's name as it should appear on this list.

If you know a high school senior who may be eligible for the Council scholarship, please have him/her call the Nature Center for an application form (410-887-1815). **Applications should be postmarked no later than April 7.**

POND CRISIS: We Need Your Help! by President Mike Burns

Looking into the meadow behind the sugaring shed and archaeology buildings, Oregon Ridge visitors can see a forest of reeds behind a wooden fence and gate. Plaques by the gate display pictures and legends explaining the creation of this once vibrant nature pond.

Sadly, unstoppable leakage and overgrown weeds (mainly phragmites reeds) have degraded this valuable educational and environmental amenity. The pond has been a part of the Oregon Ridge nature complex for more than two decades. Children and adults alike delighted in the chance to observe plants and fish, amphibians and birds in a natural setting. Kids could fish the pond on special days, trying to hook an elusive sunfish or scoop up a squiggly tadpole. School classes counted it as a highlight of their visits. Every day, you could walk around the pond and see something interesting – if you could fend off the fiercely territorial geese.

Over the years, the pond's health has been in decline. It is a man-made feature, but the natural bottom has leaked

excessively. Sometimes the pond was refilled by pumping the stream, other times by a good rainy season, but with no lasting solution to the persistent ravages of drought and seepage.

Sporadic attempts to address the pond's condition produced some ideas and some guesses on cost, but no detailed plan or analysis. Now there is new hope that the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks will seek a sound, lasting solution to restore it. Bob Barrett, the department chief, recently inspected the site, accompanied by staff and ORNC volunteers. Mr. Barrett was briefed on the pond's history and efforts at remediation. He voiced encouraging intention to find and construct a remedy and is consulting county experts. County Councilman T. Bryan McIntire, in our district, favors the project. Others need to get behind this proposal.

It is my hope that those of you who enjoy this unique nature center will express your support for the restoration of a healthy, sustaining pond, and its integral ecology. **Please let your Baltimore County officials know of your interest in this project and its importance.** Then, hopefully, we will all be able to soon benefit again from its comforting, delightful, and instructive environmental vitality.

NEW IRON FURNACE EXHIBIT EDUCATES AND TRANSCENDS TIME

The new Iron Furnace Exhibit was finished and delivered to ORNC back in November, installed this winter by county maintenance staff, and is now open for the public's enjoyment and education. The exhibit features panels that talk about the furnace, the community, the town, and some of the people who operated and owned the whole operation. Signs showing silhouettes of the furnace and directional arrows are strategically placed to indicate the location of the new exhibit to hikers and folks driving into the park.

Malibu artist Sandy Glover, who we have worked with for over 10 years, did the artwork for the reconstructions. The cost of the nine exhibits was \$8,150.00, a portion of which was paid for by a \$10,000 donation from REI of Timonium, and which also covered the cost of the Treks lumber walkway and trail improvements to the parks trail system. The Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council picked up the rest of the expenses. **FKD**



Photos of the New Iron Furnace Exhibit



A sample of pig iron shown here in the bottom right photo

MR. HOOTY COMES TO OREGON RIDGE

by Kirk Dreier

Whoooo is Mr. Hooty? He is a brand new screech owl that staff naturalist Courtney Peed is obtaining from the Raptor Conservancy of Virginia. Very soon Courtney will travel down to Falls Church to pick up *Otus asio*, the Eastern Screech Owl. Mr. Hooty is an animal rescue and cannot fly since his untimely impact with a car. Now he will become a permanent resident here at ORNC where many thousands of school children will have the opportunity to see him over his lifetime.



Mr. Hooty cannot "hoot," nor does he screech. Rather this small member of the owl family gives a variety of tremulous calls that have the rather ethereal sound of a lost soul or a mournful horse giving an elongated whinny. His call was once thought to be an omen of death. Upon hearing this owl's spooky sound, inhabitants of Louisiana's Cajun

country would climb out of bed and turn their left shoe upside down to hush the call. If that didn't work they pulled their left trouser pocket inside out. However, the Eastern Screech Owl's perceived death call is really just the opposite. Its call usually foretells the beginning of life. The breeding season for the screech owl begins in late winter and the male screech owl becomes very vocal when staking out its territory and displaying for the females with a flurry of wailing, head bobbing, hopping, and wing flapping.

Females will use a variety of nesting chambers for laying eggs, including unlined cavities in trees, abandoned nests of flicker and pileated woodpeckers, and even nest boxes. In March the female will lay 4-5 eggs and incubation lasts about 26 days. After hatching the young remain in the hole for about a month. If times are "fat" and plenty of food is available for the parents to feed the young, all is well. On the other hand, if times are lean the birds will practice cannibalism with the strongest of the young eating their weaker siblings! The varied menu for the birds includes bats, insects, mice, small birds, shrews, crayfish, frogs and flying squirrels. Most non-insect food items are killed and eaten during the winter.

There are two color phases of this owl -- a gray and a red phase, both of which can occur within the same brood. The gray phase seems to be ten times more likely to occur in our neighboring state of Pennsylvania. Also, this is the only small

owl with "ear" tufts on each side of its head. Eastern Screech Owls are one of our more common owls and feel at home in suburban neighborhoods as well as wooded areas near towns and cities.

We are hoping to have Mr. Hooty here by early spring or sooner. Right now he is away being trained with anklets so we can handle him. Look for him at the back of the Center in the raptor mew, just outside the auditorium doors.

JEANNE COLE: OREGON RIDGE'S SHINING STAR 2007

In December Baltimore County Recreation and Parks commended approximately 45 volunteers at its second annual "SHINING STAR" Ceremony. One of Oregon Ridge's shiniest stars was chosen for this special commendation. Jeanne Cole has volunteered at the Nature Center for over 18 years. She has become one of our most knowledgeable Trail Guides during that time, leading school children on field trips at least once a week. She has worn many other hats in her service to Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council. She has served as President of the Council, Board Member, Membership Committee Chair, and still serves as Volunteer Chair and a coordinator for special events including the Honey Harvest Festival and the Pancake Breakfast. Jeanne was also employed at the Center at one time as a teacher's aide to Glenn Swiston, then the Teacher/Naturalist for Baltimore County Public Schools.

Jeanne is very active at her church, running the Food Pantry at St. Vincent DePaul, and she has volunteered to help homeless women at My Sister's Place. She also spends a good bit of her time gardening and caring for her grandchildren.

Jeanne is a dedicated, no nonsense individual who believes in getting a job done. She expects little in return, so we were so pleased to have her as our "Shining Star" of 2007. Jeanne is our personal "Woman of the Year." **MJS**



(left to right) Recreation & Parks Director Bob Barrett, 1st District Councilman Samuel Moxley, County Councilman Bryan McIntire, Jeanne Cole and County Executive Jim Smith at BCRP's second Shining Star Ceremony.

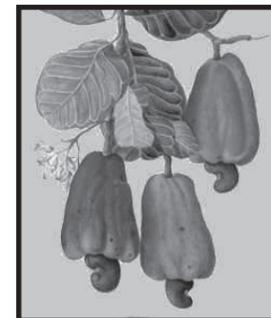
"NUTS" ABOUT POISON IVY

by Courtney Peed

Have you ever spent a pleasant day hiking in the woods and picked what you thought was a friendly plant? You looked at the pretty, shiny leaves and strange white flowers and then placed the plant back on the ground, thinking nothing of it. That night you decided not to shower immediately because you were hungry. After eating, you slumped down in front of the TV in your favorite chair and nodded off. You awoke to find a strange rash on your hands and fingers. What happened?

As you have probably already guessed, the answer lies in the title of this article. Poison ivy affects many people in different ways, but most of us get a bubbly, itchy rash after contact with the plant. Even though poison ivy is irritating to some of us, it's a very important food source for wildlife and doesn't make them itch at all. The "berries" (technically called a *drupe*) provide a much-needed snack for winter migrating birds, and on snowy days the young sprouts feed mammals such as rabbits. Its clusters of three leaflets help identify the plant in the spring and summer (Leaflets of three, let it be!). The leaflets become magnificent red foliage in the fall, which then drop to reveal a fuzzy, ropy vine in the winter. If you are allergic, do not touch poison ivy at any time of year. The plant will affect you even when it looks dead.

Poison Ivy (*Rhus radicans*) is kin to an unexpected family of plants. The cashew is its cousin, and these tasty nuts can also

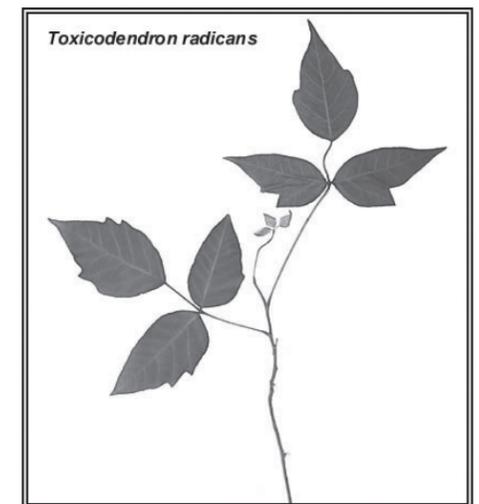


Cashew Fruit and Nut

give some a case of the "itchies." Poison ivy can be a vine or a shrub and can live in virtually any soil type. Insects pollinate its greenish-white blossoms in the summer months. Drooping white fruits (Berries white, take flight!) develop and persist into autumn to the culinary delight of local and migrating birds. Birds digest everything but the seed, which exits via its own tidbit of fertilizer, spreading the poisonous plant quickly and efficiently. Land bound mammals also help in a similar though less effective manner. Birds know to zero-in on these fruits due to an evolved relationship between plant and animal known as *foliar fruit flagging*. The plant's vibrant red color indicates that its fruits are high in energy due to its fat content, thus attracting migrating birds that depend on that energy to survive the cold winter months.

A persistent myth about poison ivy is that even the slightest contact can cause a severe reaction, or *contact dermatitis*. While some may insist that they can contract these symptoms just by looking at a plant, most people have to touch an ooz-

ing surface or inhale smoke from a burning plant to become irritated. Poison ivy contains a resin called *urushiol*, which is oily and clings to the skin. A good way to rid oneself of the oil is with very hot water, soap, and rubbing alcohol. Taking a bath or washing hands is highly effective if done promptly. If you are not near soap and water, you can also use jewelweed in the field to wash your skin. Here at ORNC, we chop up plantain and immerse it in rubbing alcohol. The solution sits in a jar all summer to be used whenever necessary. It is rubbed on an affected area with cotton or a soft cloth. Your local drug store carries more expensive treatments, but the cheaper alternative has always worked just as well for us.



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We encourage members to submit articles of interest.
The next newsletter will be the April/May/June issue.
Please note that the deadline for articles for this issue
is February 25.