



## Kids learn outdoors Saturday

By Sam Dieter

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Once again this year, a group of area kids spent part of their weekend learning their way around guns and the outdoors.

Just over 70 kids – and some of their parents – went to Pat Jones' property north of town Saturday to take part in the Youth Outdoor Skills Day organized by the Hunting Heritage Group. At least 27 had taken the final test the night before at Colby Community College for a hunter education course.

The hands-on experience fulfilled part of the course requirements for those kids. A hunter education card is required for most people to get a hunting license in Kansas.

"Everybody here is a volunteer, all the instructors, all the coordinators," said Josh Williams, who works with the heritage group. "It's hugely supported by the community."

Williams, whose daughter Kenlee, 6, was one of the participants, reminded the group to thank the volunteers if they saw them, and tell their friends about the day.

Robb Ross, the principal of Colby Middle School, showed the kids how to handle a bow. Ross explained the dangers of weapons that can hurt someone who is not careful. He told the kids the story of an archery shop he'd been to where a sign said you will be charged \$50 to "dry fire" a bow (pull the string back and let go without an arrow on it) even once. Strings can break if someone pulls on them too much, Ross said. It happened to one man he sold a bow to, who ended up with 32 stitches in his arm.

Unlike bullets, he said, arrows can injure a person before they are even loaded on a weapon. Even swinging the sharp tip of a hunting arrow can badly injure anyone it hits.

"If you're by yourself, you may or may not make it out," Ross said.

Barry Kaaz, who works at Colby Community College, showed the students a sharp broadhead arrow and demonstrated how to fire a bow by shooting balloons attached to a target.

Mike Hopper, the game warden or conservation officer for Wallace, Sherman and Cheyenne counties, taught kids about fur harvesting or trapping. Thirteen animals can legally be harvested for fur in Kansas, including small ground-dwelling animals like foxes, raccoons and skunks. Being able to trap an animal and sell its fur requires a special permit and training, Hopper said.

Hopper showed kids a stack of pelts and went over the laws with them. Traps with teeth are illegal in Kansas, he said. He demonstrated how to set up a similar trap that catches an animal with smooth-side metal jaws. First, he said, dig a shallow hole in front of a burrow. Then sift the rocks out of some loose dirt to cover the trap, and put rocks around it so the animal will step in the center where the trap is. If you've done it right, the jaws will pop out of the dirt and snare the critter.

"Some of the most ingenious people I've ever met were trappers," he told one group. "The critters, they're not stupid just because they're critters."

Kids stopped at five stations, and the kids spent time at each. They also took turns working with a compass, firing shotguns (there were air rifles for the little ones) and learning how to fire a muzzle-loading rifle.

Williams said the group organized the event, but thanked the sponsors, including Walmart, Dillons, Ducks Unlimited, the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism, Colby Community College, the Thomas County Sheriff, the Colby Trap Club, Pheasants Forever, the county attorney, Orscheln Farm and Home Supply, Stephen Shull and the Nature Conservancy.

"I enjoyed it. It was really neat," said Shawn Reinert. "We live out in the country, so we go out quite a lot."

Reinert was there with his son Hayden, 13, who took the hunter education class. He said they plan on shooting a few pheasants.

"It was a fun, good learning experience," he said.



Neo Brown got a lesson in firing a shotgun (above) Saturday during the Youth Outdoor Skills day event on Pat Jones' property. Firearms were among the main subjects the kids learned about that day. Jeanie Strick (left, at right) and Kenlee Williams plugged their ears as their friends fired muzzle-loading rifles. Lewis Haines, (below, right) grabbed a PVC-pipe gun during the orienteering section of the event when the kids were taught to be careful with weapons while crossing fences. A favorite among some of the kids was archery (below).

SAM DIETER/Colby Free Press



## Student from Ireland notes differences in 4-H

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A college graduate from Northern Ireland is leaving Thomas County today after three weeks in Gem as part of a 4-H exchange, saying she sees both differences and similarities with her home.

"I wanted to see how families live in a different country," said Hannah McCollum, 22, of Londonderry. "There's no major differences in family life."

McCollum planned to wrap up her stay in Gem today. She has been in Kansas since the start of July with the International 4-H Youth Exchange program, and has been staying in Gem with Wallace and Carol Severson and their daughter, Ariel, 20.

"Everything's bigger," she said of Kansas. "You travel a long time before you get anywhere. I would have been across Ireland a couple of times before I drove the length of Kansas."

Ireland is 200 miles across at its broadest point, she said, but the roads are not straight. A trip across the

island would take about three hours with the twists and turns included.

McCollum stayed with a family in Fort Scott for her first three weeks in Kansas, then the Severson's other daughter, Jenny, picked her up and drove her here just in time for the county fair. Ariel Severson became the Thomas County Rodeo Queen during the fair, and McCollum went to see her new roommate compete in the pageant before she'd even unpacked her things.

She saw some things at the fair that she might never see again, including the rodeo and the demolition derby. In Fort Scott, McCollum saw a ranch rodeo, with events like wild cow milking that she said she probably would not try out for.

"They're different in the activities that happen," she said of the two countries, "but I think the interest is the same."

The Young Farmers Club, Ireland's equivalent of 4-H, had livestock judging, she said, but not a livestock sale. The group has public speaking and drama and five-a-side football (meaning soccer) games. She said she used to play field hockey along with

participating in the Young Farmers.

McCollum admitted to being allergic to horses. Although she works with cattle at home, they use four-wheelers to get around the field, she said, and only put ear tags on them, not brands. She was impressed by visits to Timmerman Feeding Co. and McCarty Family Farms east of Colby. She also got to see bison on a nearby farm.

"We don't have cattle production on that scale in any place back home," McCollum said.

She said hedges serve as fences to keep cattle in one pasture there, and they could never be kept outside much, since it is so wet; they would get sores on their legs.

Her family has a beef cattle farm near Londonderry, she said, and uses rubber mats to keep the herd's hooves dry. They used to grow vegetables, she said, but now the only crop they have is grass for their cattle.

"It's not always been beef," McCollum said. "We grew a lot of potatoes when I was younger."

One of her memories from the farm is working a potato harvesting machine which rips the crop out of

the ground. She and her family would pick out rocks and clods of dirt from among potatoes as they passed by on a conveyor belt.

"I think they're better at home," she said of the potatoes.

Carol Severson works for Great Plain Spraying, and McCollum got to see the feedlot from the air, along with another new sight: circles of crops. She said Irish farmers do not use aerial spraying or irrigation on nearly the scale that farmers here do.

"You probably would be glad of your warm weather here," she said to Wallace Severson.

She added that her home country had a "heat wave" of 86-degree weather. There is a lot of rain there, she said, but hardly any thunder or lightning.

"From anywhere in Ireland, you'll see the hills,

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