

Voyageurs bring history to life at Grand Kankakee Marsh County Park



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HEBRON | Frolicking in stocking feet and 18th century dress, a young girl pulled a carved, wooden horse behind her as young lads in coonskin caps with faux flintlocks took aim.

Nearby, fur trade-era re-enactors and members of the Theatiki Fife & Drum Corps readied for Saturday's opening ceremony of the 28th Annual Voyageur Rendezvous at Grand Kankakee Marsh County Park.

Wrapped around the river's bend, the re-enactment is hosted by the Kankakee Alliance and Habitants du Post de Miamis and sponsored by Lake County Parks.

Pungent smoke from the many encampment fires wafted through the air as the re-enactors, with much pomp, raised the flags of France, England and the United States.

Modern groups of people from China and Ecuador meandered through the encampment soaking up the ambiance.

"This is our first time. We feel very excited. I'm very happy to see so many traditional things," Jiang Baozhen, Chinese director of the Confucius Institute at Valparaiso University, said. She brought a contingent of eight, including a visiting scholar, she said, to the event.

Sipping on a bottle of sarsaparilla and viewing the period ironwork created by Jim Jacobs ,of Lafayette, Jiang Baozhen said, "This is very special. I like this very much."

Jacobs, an author, also displayed his book, "Building the Piroque: Creating a Cheap Boat Ideal for Hunting, Fishing and Voyaging" for park visitors to peruse.

Nearby, Tim Jordan of Peru, Ind., examined the many period wares and artisan work displayed. "I used to set up the wigwams here," he said. Jordan is one of 1,400 Cherokee registered in Kentucky, he said.

Taking in the sights and smells, Mario Rivera said, "It is more than we expected." He and his companion, Jenny Montez, are students at Valparaiso University where they are learning English before returning to Ecuador to teach English. "I like to learn the early traditions," he said.

For Theresa Larkin, of Kouts, stopping in at Larry's Emporium where wooden utensils are produced was a real pleasure. "I'm so glad I came. I'm having a great time," she said.

Sitting next to his fire, Cliff Tetrault, of Lowell, offered up candledipping for youngsters. The Children's Trading Post and historic games as well as a See and Do Scavenger Hunt kept kids busy.

The Rendezvous continues from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. today with voyageurs arriving by canoe for a trading session with American Indians at 11:30 a.m. as well as historic dancing, an 18th century fashion show and storytelling.

Admission is \$3 with children seven and younger free.

Grand Kankakee Marsh County Park is at 21690 Range Line Road, Hebron. From Interstate 65, take the Ind. 2 exit and head east one mile to Clay Street, aka Range Line road. Go south about five miles to the park.