

**Great American Backyard Campout  
False Cape State Park June 28-29, 2014  
By Bruce Julian**

False Cape State Park had its first Great American Backyard Campout (GABC) this year and we had eight visitors to camp with us. Although most of the Virginia State Parks had been participating in GABC for the last 4 years this was the first year for our park. We had one family of four, another family of two and two young friends to participate with us. They all met at Little Island City Park there in Virginia Beach at 4:00 P.M. and we helped each load their gear onto our Tram for the 8 mile ride into False Cape. As we left the city park driving into Back Bay Wildlife Refuge we passed one of many Osprey Platforms which are in the refuge and the state park. The mother and father were on the nest with the two young babies feeding them and all the children were able to see this for the first time. We drove off of the paved road, that takes you into the refuge, and left all the traffic behind for the next two days.

Reaching False Cape State Park after the 6 mile ride we stopped at our Visitor Center and Gift Shop. We were only here for about 15 minutes so everyone could sign in and look around some. We still had 2 miles to travel down to False Cape Landing where we would camp for the night. We parked the Tram and put on our backpacks for a short hike to our campsite, which was at sites 7-8 & 9. When we arrived at the site, I introduced our campers to the other 5 volunteers that would be helping for the weekend. We talked for a few minutes about what we had planed for the two days and then John G. brought out is pack and started showing all of his gear that would be needed for a two day camping trip. I had waited to put my tent up in order to show everyone the proper way to do this. After we finished the Equipment Orientation everyone went to their site and started assembling their tent. John and I watched and helped, if any was needed, and all tents were up within 20 minutes.

While dinner was being prepared by the volunteers, John and I took our guests on a hike out to the beach. Here everyone went "Wild" about our big, beautiful and deserted beach, that they were seeing for the first time. As we got to the waters edge, five of them jumped in for a refreshing dip in the ocean. Others watched and hiked up and down the beach looking for whatever could be found that had washed-up on the last high tide. We stayed on the beach for 45 minutes and then headed back to our Spaghetti Dinner, which tasted great after the swim and a hike through the sand.

For the, "Being Prepared" part of our trip, we talked about things everyone should have with them while camping and hiking in the woods. One thing was a compass, and we had a short Compass Course set up for the kids to try their hand at reading a compass. John G. had mapped out two courses, about a half mile south of our campsite, and with everyone wanting to walk off the Spaghetti Dinner; we headed out. The three small boys, 8, 11 & 12 took the compasses after a short class and led their parents to the 3 markers that John had tied to small Live Oak Trees. They all seemed to enjoy this activity, and on the way to the site; we had looked for animal tracks and Mole Tunnels. If you have never stuck your finger down into a Mole Tunnel, you should, I even had the parents plus all the kids doing this.

Back at our campsite, around 9:00 P.M. everyone had an hour of Free Time to do what ever they wanted. Around 10:15 P.M. we had everyone meet at the Kitchen Area, where we had two picnic tables under a tarp to eat our meals and have group talks. It was now time to do our Astronomy Program. We hiked out towards the beach and on the Maple Leaf Trail. We found a good spot on the south side of a large sand hill, that would hide the lights from Sandbridge and Virginia Beach, so to look for the Thousands of stars that shine over False Cape every night. The sky was clear and the Milky Way was up above us with thousands of tiny stars. We were going to use John's Smart Phone to look for different formations, but his phone could not get a signal, however, Samantha, one of our guest, was able to get a signal and our program was saved. It was about 11:00 P.M. and we went and walked back to the tent area, and everyone prepared for a good night sleep under all those stars.

Continued on next page .....

Next morning at 7:00 A.M., we were all up and going on a Bird Hike, while breakfast was being prepared. The young boys woke up hungry after all of the activities from the day before; so we started to fix the pancakes and bagels'. It is always better to keep the stomach of small boys full, this makes them much happier. Around 8:30 A.M. we went on our Bird Hike, but instead of heading towards the beach; I chose to hike the Maple Leaf Trail west towards Back Bay. We did see and hear a few birds on the hike to the bay and had an Osprey looking for his breakfast flying over us.. The water was flat on the bay and we could see all the way across to the mainland and Cedar Island, which is part of False Cape State park. Heading back to our campsite; we hiked on the False Cape Landing Trail, where we saw about 10 Ant Lion Traps under the Sun Shelter. John G. caught one and showed everyone their little Pinchers and explained how they catch their meals as it slide down the trap.

Back at camp around 9:30 A.M., we brought out the watermelon and sliced it up for everyone. It was very sweet and cold and tasted great after our two mile hike. It was now time to take down the tents and pack up for the trip out of False Cape. "False Cape" someone asked, where did that name come from? I thought no one would ever ask; so now I was able to tell my little story of how we got our name way back when. The park at one time had a cape that looked somewhat like Cape Henry, and way back then ships coming to the New World would pass by this area and think it was Cape Henry. Here they begin heading in and lots of times they would run aground, so comes the name "Graveyard of the Atlantic" but back to our story of False Cape. As time went on the sailor that were up in the Crows Nest would be looking for this False Cape and when he spotted it would hollow out "False Cape stay clear". Then after reaching Norfolk the first thing most sailors did was to head for the nearest Pub for a cold drink. Here the men would ask; "Did you make it passed the False Cape O K?", and so the name stuck and this area is still named False Cape on every map made today.

The tram was being used; so John O (another John) and I drove two of our vehicles to carry everyone back to Little Island City Park and their cars. All present; said that this was a very good trip, and that they would be back to enjoy this park again. I thanked them for coming, and told everyone that the volunteers had just as much fun as they did. I would like to thank our volunteers, Jane & John O, Margaret J, John G and Linda B.