

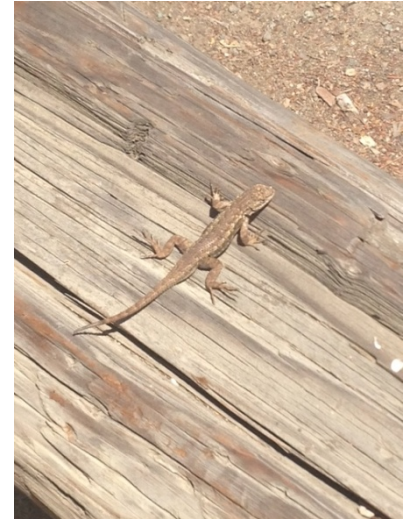
Camp Chaia at Alameda Creek in Fremont, Otherwise known as "Little Yosemite"

What fascinates me is when someone has the eye for something and sees more to it than everyone around him or her and teaches you to see what he or she sees. This is what happened for me when we went to this perfectly heated natural swimming hole for children that Nate identified for our trip today!



It was an admittedly shaky start with my needing to boot my computer to print out directions while a mom kindly watched all the kids in the car. I must say getting ready for these seems easy but there are so many little things to remember: food, lots of water, medical forms, games, music, activities once there, my own lunch :) and snacks that everyone can eat and that will survive the trip!

We went in a caravan to Fremont and eventually found our way and each other at this charming park nestled in the foothills. We were greeted by a Blue-Bellied lizard that posed for us before running off. Seagulls flew by overhead and hawks careened over our heads over the duration of the trip. We also smelled Penny Royal, a plant that has a lovely fragrance and pretty purple flowers.



The kids ate and met each other and took their time finding the best stick they could for the river trekking. This provided a teachable moment about how to determine whether a stick was safe to walk with, so we were informed by one of the children/experts that you could carry one no bigger than yourself. We liked that rule so we have formally adopted it.



They climbed and ran for a bit and then we headed off to the creek. I was fascinated with how the children each navigated their way down to the edge of where they could go with safety and how much risk they took at the beginning and then at the end. We have a variety of styles amongst the children: Devin is a "water otter" of the highest quality (mink comes to mind!) and is so at home in the water you would think she lived there at least halftime! Nico and Andrew followed and were happy to have Devin to collaborate with in securing a "ship" to sail the seas.



They managed to locate a fallen trunk, figure out how to ride and paddle and get it to go across the river. It was so wonderful to see this plan develop from birth to finish and document it for you here. It was a magical moment of collaboration, which was sorely needed, after Nico and Devin struggled at the beginning when Nico was testing the waters in reaction to the fact that there was no one exactly his age or temperament there.

Ideally we would have a pal for each one but what occurred was even more powerful because of the fact that they had to create opportunities for interaction that didn't necessarily happen naturally due to different age and gender. They continued after the boat episode to build dams and bridges and came home wanting to build a boat! I happen to be aware of a Tule boat that the Ranger at Coyote Hills used as a rowboat to cross the waters over in the Bay. I had it in my exhibit after it was "retired" and would love to see if there was an opportunity for the kids to do something like this, perhaps on a smaller scale. I will certainly look further into it!

The children for all their differences clearly feel like a group and though they often forget or are too tired to remember that others are depending on them, they rose many times to the occasion, sharing and taking turns and helping get another's shoe, for example as it started to float down the river.

We saw the Niles Canyon Train chugging by and got a wave from the conductor. For your pleasure, you can take the children for a small fee on a 1 1/2 hour ride through the canyon on the first and third weekends. I would have loved to go! You parents can also go on the train for a wine tasting that sounds delightful and for only 37\$ per person you get to taste 5 different wines, enjoy appetizers as well as you get to keep the glass and plate! Call me and we will start "Hotel Chaia!" :)



The children each met their goals of how far they were going to go into the water and we had to drag most of them out after over an hour and a half when they started to shiver. They warmed themselves like our lizard friend on the rocks and were ready for a fresh fruit and nut snack.



Elijah mentioned that he didn't want to get wet and change clothes so he created a fun military role-play for us to enact for him. It evolved however, and by the end, including him stepping into the water and asked for acknowledgment for taking that risk. I was very proud of him! How he crossed the river twice before that without getting wet was amazing!

Jasper founded an island under his name and discovered a nest inside. If I am not mistaken, I saw a baby goose in the picture I took so it could have been a goose's nest! How interesting but at the same time, I hope we didn't disturb or expose it too much, not having realized what I was intruding upon. This is why I try to depend on Nate to guide us so we leave the least amount of footprints wherever we go.



The rock skipping lessons were mostly a success, with two skips by Nico and unfortunately a minor casualty of a pebble hitting Max in the back of the head. It is so unfair and unfortunate and at the same time, I hope that after all is said and done, the children will learn to be more aware of those around them and those who had to be the ones that were being tested upon will learn that they survived these mishaps and life goes on. It is a delicate balance and I am trying not to be too Polly Anna like, but I myself know that my confrontations with some of my biggest fears have come when I have challenged myself in nature or had to pick myself up after falling and learned that I could survive my biggest nightmares, not to be over dramatic but that is how they felt at the time.

I am still working on getting a better estimate of how long it will take to get 7 tired kids into a car, say goodbye to Nate and Jasper and get home. I appreciate your patience and was so relieved to see understanding smiles and appreciation for what Nate and try to do. It is so rewarding and makes up for the tests of courage I put myself through to get this all implemented smoothly. There is always something out of ones' control and that is why I have full empathy for many of these children who feel this on a minute to minute basis since their bodies run either too fast or too sensitively for them to feel safe in an everyday environment.

When I saw a documentary where they handicapped each teacher in a different way, taking away senses or amplifying them, to simulate the children's experience, it was very revealing. I talked to the kids about how we could manage their behavior better and the conclusion was to leave a little earlier so they are not so very tired. It is hard to gauge since each child puts less or more of himself into certain activities, accordingly, but I will take that advice.



So many times we blame the kids for misbehaving but it is we who have put them in an untenable situation. And sometimes they just have to "suck it up!" as some bluntly say, so we are all learning. As long as they feel listened to, the channels of communication stay open. If I can share one thing as a seasoned mom, good listening is the essence of what you will find that will save your relationship with your child when it is on rocky waters. And if you can't listen, let them know you want to. If you can tell them there is something in the way of your doing that but that later they will have special "listening time" I can't recommend this highly enough. Five minutes of letting them say or do anything they want that is safe and then they will be able to discharge some of that frustration that inevitably builds up over time.

Thanks to Liz and Rod for driving and for their support when needed! It's midnight and I am off to bed. Enjoy and hope everyone slept well!

Sincerely,

Chaia, Nate and friends!

From Jasper's Mother:

"We asked Jasper about the highlights of the camp yesterday"... His reply, "It was lots of fun... especially the Islands. There were lots of plants." He liked the East side, the West side and the Treasure side. The treasure was a bird's nest.