

Ella

Age 11 (11-14)

Lincoln County

By My Side

“The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him and the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous is his dog,” by Senator George Graham Vest of Missouri. My best friend Ranger, who is my dog, went on a camping trip with my family this past August. My mom, dad, brother Ryan and little brother Jack and I packed our gear and set off for an amazing weekend at Washington State park with our dogs. We brought my brother’s dog Charlie, who is a female, yellow, lab-mix, and Ranger, who is a brown, white, and black English shepherd. We hiked awesome trails and floated on the Big River.

We were hiking on the 1000-steps trail while Ranger carried his and Charlie’s water in a blue dog backpack, which was strapped to his back. It was a steaming, sweltering & sweaty summer day in August and we continually refilled his water. The majestic hills were covered in giant, mossy, stone-like stairs that made me feel like I was walking to a hidden castle. The whole trail was shaded with towering trees. It was a tiring journey to get to the top but it was worth it because we stopped at a stone structure set on the side of a cliff with a breathtaking view of the rest of the park. We continued on the trail as it led us to some historic buildings, which were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and we saw stunning petroglyphs. The petroglyphs looked like a little boy was carving doodles into stones. They were symbols that were extremely essential to ancient Missourians. After that, the path led us to a playground. We

stopped and had some fun with the dogs. Once the hike was over, we finished the day off with an ice cream, for us and the dogs, from the park store.

The morning of our float trip, we, including the dogs, piled into the river guide's van. He had an enormous trailer for all the canoes. He dropped us off at the boat-launch. While my parents were unloading both canoes the dogs were exploring the river. This was Ranger's first swim. The water was just the right temperature for swimming. We had never taken the dogs on a float trip before and I thought Ranger would tip the canoe to get to Charlie. At first Ranger wouldn't hop in the canoe with the rest of us, but I convinced him to load up. Down the river we went. The water was gentle and clear. Trees provided soothing shade which was refreshing on such a scorching day. We saw abundant red-eared sliders and soft-shelled turtles slip into the cool water while we drifted by. Smoothly, we pulled our canoes onto the sandbar, to eat lunch. We ate. We swam. We played. My brothers and I daringly climbed a muddy, slippery bank. We slid down like it was a water slide, again and again. Exhausted we jumped back into our canoes and floated to the end of our trip. I was surprised that the dogs didn't tip our canoes. I defiantly want to take the dogs on another float tip on a Missouri river.

It was exciting going on a hike with our dogs at Washington State park and on a float trip on the Big river. The dogs made it twice the fun and we saw a beautiful part of Missouri. I also really liked taking a break from house chores and having fun with my family. I hope to come back again someday, with Ranger by my side.