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Rock - and rocks: Show respect and enjoy

Journey vs. Destination

By Lisa Brainard

Music... and nature. A lot of you get that at least once each summer and maybe more if you're lucky. For some it's a cruise with the car top down and stereo cranked. For others, you can multiply the music many times as you're partying with a large group at a big, multi-day concert.

I had just the right dose of music and nature a couple weekends ago when I attended The Haybarn Rendezvous at The Natural Gait, situated between Harpers Ferry, Marquette and Monona, Iowa. My favorite Celtic/folk band Switchback was there, as well as Big Blue Sky Band, one-man folk legend Dave Moore and newcomer Mark Kuhmala from London, Ontario, whose acoustic guitar music I really enjoyed.



Switchback performs in a "Cave Concert" at The Natural Gait ("Lower Gait"). The acoustics in the rock shelter are excellent.

Friday night the event opened with Switchback in a "Cave Concert." You really need to take in one of these (and there are at least a couple left this year, one involving Switchback). It's outdoors, laid-back charm with a meal first. Then, it's time to psyche up, grab the thick, heavy rope "railing" for support, and climb up the hillside steps carved out of the dirt to the bluff. It's quite unique - and yes, everyone made it up!

The cave itself is a rock shelter used by American Indians. It continues to prove its value with amazing acoustics for a small band or solo singer. Everyone hauls his or her chair up in its bag, then finds a fairly even spot on the rock floor to place the chair for the intimate concert setting.

Excellent is all I can say.

Saturday I decided to hike some of the horseback riding/hiking trails and did around 5.5 miles, managing to check out both the lower and middle crossings of Yellow River, thinking of potential routes for future backpacking or snowshoeing trips. Sunday I headed to the upper Yellow River crossing. It ends up just across from the aforementioned Cave Concert location, which is near the Ion Exchange, where the same couple who own The Natural Gait raise and sell prairie plants and seeds.

To simplify locations, the Ion environs are called "Lower Gait" while events at The Natural Gait on the bluff above (yet 6 miles away on county gravel roads) is known as "Upper Gait." Advice: Just make sure you have your directions down before leaving home. And then, allow extra time, just in case you miss a turn. I always figure exploring back roads is great fun, but perhaps not when you really want to arrive at a concert on time.

I camped in my tent at the campground near the cabins at "Upper Gait." It's a great location, complete with covered horse stalls if you want to go there with your horse and ride.

One event I missed was kayaking on Yellow River with the Switchback duo on Thursday before the concert. That can be remedied, however. The first annual Harvest Dance Weekend with Switchback is set for Sept. 10 and 11. Friday night there will be a cave concert. Saturday there's lunch, kayaking, transportation and - of course - music. Call 877-776-2208 for more information, or try either or both of these websites:

www.thenaturalgait.com

www.waygoodmusic.com

Yet more on rock

Shall we rock and roll even more?

No, this is not being thrown out in honor of the anniversary of Elvis' death. I want to briefly continue on a recent Journey vs. Destination topic of looking for rocks, the nerds who look for rocks and, yes, those who also think rocks might be something more than cold hard stone.

I wrote about what I perceived to be a magic stone. On a trip west I left the huge stone where I found it, and instead was pleased to take a chunk already broken from it - my new talisman.

In talking with someone about this, she explained she also picked up rocks while on trips. (Really, who doesn't? I'm starting to think the nerds are the ones with no heart for a pretty or interesting piece of stone.) She had heard some interesting things about crystals in rocks seeming to want things right. She also was surprised to find her daughter and son-in-law had picked up a rock somewhere and hauled it home.

The daughter said, "We just weren't able to sleep since we brought that rock back."

So she moved the rock to a spot out on a deck and told it (sweetly, I assume, to appease the not-so-stone-faced gods of rock), "We're really happy you're here. And now we've moved you to a nice spot outside. We hope you like it."

After that the couple had no trouble sleeping, she reported. So here are my words of wisdom, "respect that special rock - don't worry about the raised eyebrows and snide comments."

'Nuf said. Now get out and enjoy all forms of rock.

Lisa Brainard is the news editor for the Republican-Leader and Chatfield News. She writes for the Phillips Bluff Country Publishing group of newspapers, which also includes the Spring Grove Herald, Bluff Country Reader, News-Record, and Spring Valley Tribune. She can be reached at: lbrainard@bluffcountrynews.com. She also photographs many scenic landscapes in her travels near and far, in addition to taking numerous newspaper photos.