



Over 200 people gathered at our first Summer Family Evening in June to learn about wolves! Thanks to Del Norte Credit Union for making these events possible again in 2019.

Photo by Rachel Landman

VOLUME 19, NUMBER 3, SUMMER 2019

PAJARITO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER, LOS ALAMOS, NM

2020 Is Coming!

By Katherine Bruell, Executive Director

PEEC is humming with excitement about our 20th anniversary in 2020. We're already planning some very special programming, some looks back and forward, and, of course, a great party to celebrate (hint: Felicia Orth is on the planning committee!).

Since a large part of my job as executive director is ensuring that PEEC has the resources to continue our work in the next 20 years, the upcoming anniversary has spurred me to think about planned giving. Why should this matter to you?

You have been a huge support to PEEC. Because of you, hundreds — thousands! — of children and adults have experienced the joy of learning and exploring outside. As a result of your gifts to PEEC, children are outside collecting, counting, and graphing bugs vs. spiders in their schoolyards. Teenagers are backpacking and learning how strong they really are. Adults are visiting geological sites and learning about our past and our future. And families are going outside at night to spot constellations they learned in the planetarium. Your support of PEEC ensures that future generations will value nature as much as you do — and will work to protect nature, just like you do.

With a planned gift, you can make sure all of this keeps

“We included PEEC in our estate plan because we love what PEEC does for the community, especially children. PEEC makes excellent use of its funds.”

— Robin and Richard McLean

happening for years to come. As I've learned about planned giving, I've found answers to lots of questions.

Q. Planned giving? Are you trying to say that I'm not going to be here forever?

A. Life comes with a 100% mortality rate, though we hear Google is working to change that. In the meantime, planned giving is a great way to make sure your passion for nature on the Pajarito Plateau lives on.

Q. I'm not hugely wealthy. Isn't planned giving only for people like Bill Gates?

A. Anyone can make a planned gift, either through a will or a simple procedure like designating PEEC as the

beneficiary of a life insurance policy. You don't have to be fabulously wealthy to make a difference. Many people with estates of all sizes leave a legacy gift to charitable organizations like PEEC.

Q. I'd love to support PEEC, but I plan on giving everything to my kids.

A. We respect your commitment to your family. Of course, family always comes first! But did you know that you can support PEEC with a very small portion of your estate? Even as little as 1-5% of your estate can make a big difference in helping to get people outside to enjoy and protect nature, while still leaving plenty for your children. We invite you to talk with your children about charitable giving in general, about PEEC, and about why your support of PEEC is important to you.

Q. Planned giving sounds very complicated. What's all this about trusts, vehicles, annuities, etc.? Will I have to pay a lawyer to arrange it?

A. Planned giving can be very simple. You may have to pay a lawyer to add to your will, if you already have one written. Often the fee is small because you are making a slight change to an existing plan. We recommend that you work with your accountant, financial planner, or attorney. Making certain that your plan reflects your wishes is important even if there is some cost associated with doing so.

Q. Anyway, I don't really need to think about this now, do I?

A. Of course not! But why wait? If you've decided you'd like to leave a legacy and be remembered as a critical part of PEEC's work, you can take action now and then not have to worry about it again.

Because of you, children and adults have had life-changing experiences in the outdoors: experiences that have shown them how fun and fascinating nature can be; experiences that have made them fierce champions for protecting the Pajarito Plateau and all of nature. But this work can't continue without your ongoing support. Your passion, energy, and commitment to nature can endure with a legacy gift.

Questions? Please reach out: director@peecnature.org or 505-662-0460. I'd love to hear from you. 📞



Muley Point is a great place to stop and camp on the way to Moab or Lake Powell. (Photo by Karen Holmes)

Summer Adventures in Southern Utah: Road Trips from the Pajarito Plateau

By Karen Holmes

www.southwestfamilyadventures.com

For most people, a family road trip through Utah would necessarily involve stops at the popular Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks. But, if you get a bit off the beaten path, you can experience some of the other wonders of the Southwest and escape the crowds for a more unique and adventurous vacation. These are a few of our family's favorite places in southern Utah:

1. Muley Point: If you're heading towards Moab or Lake Powell and are looking for an incredible place to camp (primitive), consider the relatively short (but, yes, out of the way) drive up to Muley Point. You'll drive up the narrow, impressive switchbacks of the Moki Dugway. At the top, 99.9% of people will turn right, having no clue that a few miles to the left, you can drive your car right up to the edge of the mesa and camp under the stars, waking to the incredible landscape of Monument Valley below. If your kids are older, consider camping near the edge as it's an amazing experience. If your kids are younger, there are a handful of side roads leading to safer spots.

2. Fry Canyon: Halfway between Blanding and Route 276, this short slot canyon is literally right off the road. Throw on some clothes that can get wet and old tennis shoes and you're good to go. Walk down the slickrock



Slot canyons are lots of fun for kids to explore! Check out Spooky and Peekaboo Canyons in Southern Utah for a fun introduction to canyoneering. (Photo by Karen Holmes)

into the canyon and it gets fun fast. Head down the canyon a couple hundred yards, then turn around and go back. It is a fun, cool way to break up a long drive.

3. Burr Trail: This scenic byway between Bullfrog Marina/Lake Powell and Boulder, Utah ranks as one of the most beautiful stretches of road I've seen. You experience all the moods of Utah and skirt the fringes of Grand Staircase-Escalante and Capitol Reef Parks. It is easily accessible by 2WD and drivable in a couple of hours. There is primitive camping along the way and a campground near Boulder.

4. Spooky and Peekaboo Canyons: You'll have to brave the washboard of Hole in the Rock Road, but exploring these two short canyons is a great way to spend the day. Be warned – they get narrow in parts, less than twelve inches wide, but they make for an exciting and adventurous introduction to canyoneering.

5. Hells Backbone: This incredible route outside of Escalante takes you along the ridge of Boulder Mountain. With spectacular canyon views and several streams and lakes to choose from, camping in this area

(primitive or campground) is hard to beat.

6. Calf Creek Falls: This popular well-trodden path is worth mentioning primarily because of the unexpectedly gorgeous waterfall at the end. After the fairly easy three-mile hike (our five-year-old did it), enjoy lunch in the shade and take a dip in the refreshing pool. Get there early as the parking lot fills up fast!

Utah is far. It's almost seven hours to Muley Point from Los Alamos. But I promise it's worth it. Roadtripping with kids can be rough. We pack snack bags and make sure we have the "kids' playlist" and audiobooks ready for the stereo. Each kid gets a small bin and/or a backpack for their toys, drawing books, etc. When the whining gets to be too much, it helps to embrace it and have a true family complaining session. Make sure you join in with your own laments, "I'm soooo bored! I'm sick and tired of hot dogs! Dad's feet stink!" The whinier and sillier, the better. Hopefully your kids, like ours, will laugh and it will ease the tension of being stuck in a car for hours. I also like to pile on the don'ts - "Don't whine! Don't frown! Don't breathe! Don't sit! Don't stand! Don't look! Don't close your eyes!" Again, the sillier and crazier, the better.

Utah is a beautiful state and it's right around the corner from us. Step off the beaten path this summer and challenge yourself to find your OWN adventure in the desert! 🌀

Silent Stalker: Our Great Horned Owl

By Marilyn Lisowski

"Hoo hoooo!! Hoo hoo!" echoes across Bayo Canyon in the early evening dark. "Hoo hoo!" floats the faint answering call. You probably thought the canyon belonged to Los Alamos County. You were wrong. Mated pairs of Great Horned Owls own and defend every canyon's entire width and length at night, year round, fiercely attacking intruding raptors. At dusk, the two-foot long owls glide silently over their territory, peering with large yellow eyes at the ground below, listening, with hearing ten times as sensitive as our own. Suddenly, they swoop to the ground, snatch a rabbit or mouse with their fearsome talons, and soar away on wings that span almost five feet.

Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) dwell in all of



Great Horned Owls are the largest owl in New Mexico. (Photo by Bob Walker)

North America and south almost as far as Patagonia. They are so versatile they can live in coniferous forests, rain forests, and subarctic tundra. The owls are famously open-minded about food. They will eat almost any small mammal, fish, or bird. In New Mexico, an owl's diet is primarily rabbits, mice, and other rodents, supplemented with ring-necked pheasants, chickens, and even house cats. It kills prey by crushing with two-inch talons, stabbing, beheading, or dropping prey from great heights onto a rocky mesa, plunging down to consume its meal. It throws up undigested bone, fur and feathers in hard pellets.

The largest owl in New Mexico, the Great Horned Owl, sports feathers in a V shape over its eyes, ending in long tufts called "plumicorns" at the top of its head. This gives the owl a sinister stare like its distant forebears, the crested dinosaurs. Specialized flight feathers reduce air turbulence allowing a stealthy approach. Navajo tribes in New Mexico used the feathers to make arrows fly silently. Zuni peoples held the feathers in their mouths when ambushing enemies.

Great Horned Owls never deign to build their own nest. They usurp nests of other raptors in holes high in the tufa, or tucked into protected ledges. After winter mating, the female lays two to three eggs in February. A "brood patch" on her abdomen has extra blood vessels and no feathers to keep the eggs warm. Embryos develop quickly, sometimes making tiny chirps while still in the egg. Nestlings hatch in March after about thirty days incubation, covered in whitish gray, downy fluff. Then, the parents' work really begins.

They must feed each owlet up to five mice or half a rabbit every night. By dawn the exhausted parents

sleep. Owl nestlings grow fast, and lurch out to fly after seven to ten weeks. They stay close, but by the end of fall, they leave their parents' territory to become "floaters," locate a mate and carve out new real estate.

Great Horned Owls live an average of thirteen years. Adults have no natural predators except eagles and other Great Horned Owls, but half of all juveniles never reach adulthood. They often fall from the nest and become prey for larger mammals. Adult deaths are largely human caused: flying into wires, automobiles, or buildings, and being shot or trapped. It is illegal to shoot or trap any owls, even those raiding a chicken coop. As with many species, loss of habitat has pushed them into suburbs and lessened their numbers.

Some summer evening, plan to go owling. Listen for eerie hooting, and screams, barks, chuckles, squawks, and growls. You might see a mottled light and dark brown barrel-shaped body, so camouflaged it's easily missed. Its head might swivel 275 degrees as you pass beneath, spooky yellow eyes following your every move. With a silent swoosh, it will lift off to soar, leaving you smiling, lucky to have seen it. 🦉



Many great backpacking trips await in the Pecos Wilderness in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This photo was taken at the divide between the Santa Barbara River drainage and the Truchas Lakes basin. (Photo by Jean Dewart)

Summer Backpacking in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado

By Jean Dewart

This is a special year, with the great winter snowpack

and amazing spring snowfalls! Snow will hang on into mid-June on north facing slopes in the trees — so some scouting of trails may be required before setting out with a backpack this year, to assure that the trails are open!

That said, two of my favorite hiking areas are the Pecos Wilderness in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of Northern New Mexico and the South San Juan Wilderness, in southern Colorado north of Chama, NM. In both areas the trails have mostly been constructed with horse travel in mind. Thus, many of the trails do not have steep up and down sections — this allows for backpackers to really be able to hike for miles into the far corners of these wilderness areas. Another feature I enjoy about these areas is the number of one-way (point to point) hiking trips and loop hiking trips you can create. Both wilderness areas will have a good supply of water this year — and so backpacking will not require carrying lots of drinking water.

In the Pecos the one-way, roughly forty-mile thru-hike between Santa Barbara Campground and the Santa Fe Ski Basin is a Northern New Mexico classic. The trek crosses the Truchas Peaks and Pecos Baldy, then finishes up passing Santa Fe Baldy and Lake Peak. Trailrider's Wall on this section of trail is a must for local backpackers. This two-mile trail section on a ridge top between the Truchas Lake and Pecos Baldy Lake has fabulous views. Many loop hikes can be created from Jack's Creek campground — including visiting Pecos Baldy, Pecos Falls, and Trailrider's Wall.

The Continental Divide Trail (#810) traverses the South San Juan Wilderness and makes for wonderful above tree-line hiking. Because of this area's distance from large population centers and the lack of peaks above 14,000 feet, few Coloradans visit. It's full of high lakes, elk, marmots, and deer. The Three Forks trailhead allows for a number of loop backpack trips. Backpackers will have to be aware of the spruce bark beetle impacts in the South San Juan, however. Thousands of trees have died in the past three to five years. This has caused some problems with trails being closed (due to downed trees) and care must be taken because of safety issues in windy conditions due to falling trees. But it remains one of the most beautiful areas within a day of Los Alamos.

Trailheads in the Pecos Wilderness can be reached in about ninety minutes of driving. The Three Forks trailhead is about a three-hour drive from Los Alamos



The South San Juan Wilderness in southern Colorado offers amazing backpacking within a day's drive of Los Alamos. This photo was taken along the Continental Divide Trail above the Adams Fork of the Conejos River. (Photo by Jean Dewart)

via Chama, NM and Platoro, Colorado. The Continental Divide Trail in the South San Juan Wilderness can also be accessed from Cumbres Pass, above Chama, NM.

Remember to bring the ten essentials on your hike: navigation, a headlamp, sun protection, a first-aid kit, a knife, a stove or materials for starting a fire, shelter, extra food, extra water, and extra clothing. In the summertime in Northern New Mexico and Southern Colorado, monsoon season can bring cold rain at elevations from 8,000 to 13,000 feet, so good rain gear is a must (jacket, pack cover, and pants) at these high elevations.

I hope you will enjoy backpacking on these trails as much as I do! ⚡

Which Los Alamos Nature Center Critter Are You?



Find out at peecnature.org/critter-quiz

Getting Your Gophers

By Elaine Petschek

My parents always had a kitchen garden. At some point it became a kitchen farm. I don't remember gophers as a child in Los Alamos on First Street. I was either not paying any attention, or there were no gophers on First Street.

Later my parents retired to La Senda — that's where the kitchen farm was — and there were lots and lots of gophers. Each time I would come to visit, my father would have a new maniacal method of attempting to rid the garden of gophers. I thought it was funny and a bit deranged, and would tease him about it. I was living in New York City, where I didn't have a gopher issue and actually had more sympathy for the poor little gophers than for my father who was bent on killing them. He tried all kinds of methods and I don't remember, or wasn't paying attention, to most of them. I do know he had the most success with wire traps.

After my father suddenly passed away in 2004 I moved back to New Mexico, to my own garden in the mountains east of Albuquerque. There I inherited the frustration with gophers. Gophers seemed to be everywhere. There were mounds and mounds. One day I was in the garden and was complaining about a small cherry tree that was failing. I grabbed the trunk, slightly shook it, and the whole tree came up. It looked as if there had been miniature subterranean beavers at work. I'd had it! I called Critter Control. Their solution was to poison them. At the time I was so mad I almost took them up on it until many people advised me, with good reason, against introducing the poison into the food chain. The arsenal of metal traps that I also inherited were hard to set and I didn't have much luck.

I bought an attachment to my car's exhaust and tried to asphyxiate them with carbon monoxide by putting the hose attached to the exhaust down the gopher holes. I tried moth balls, vibrating stakes, and smoke bombs. My frustration was compounded when I saw from my window a spent smoke bomb being pushed out of the hole by my nemesis, the gopher!

At some point I joined the East Mountain Garden Club. One week the program was about gophers and their habits. I learned that I had far fewer gophers than the number of mounds led me to believe, as they are

GETTING GOPHERS: easy as

Hunt 1.

-RAKE: all existing hills.

-LOOK: next morning for fresh hills.

-Choose: a hill that has a distinct "horseshoe" form.

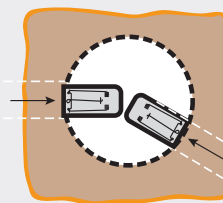
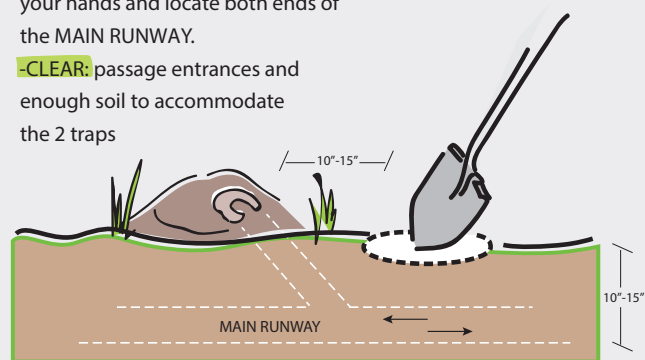
-DIG: facing the open-ended, usually lower part of the "horseshoe," dig 10"-15" down, about 12" from the base of the hill.

-POKE: the sides of the hole with your hands and locate both ends of the MAIN RUNWAY.

-CLEAR: passage entrances and enough soil to accommodate the 2 traps

Equipment:

- 2 traps, either "The Black Box" or "The Black Hole" made by Victor
 - Gardening gloves
 - Metal rake
 - Shovel or spade
 - Small trowel
 - Board or a piece of cardboard, about 2' square.
- *Best if it's been outside so it doesn't smell "funny!"



Gopher Facts:

- Gophers are solitary and very territorial, except to breed a few times a year, usually spring and summer.
- Territories are about 50' in diameter.
- Main burrows are 5-6 ft below ground.
- Gophers help with irrigation and prevent erosion.

Trap 2.

-FIT: clear out tunnel entrances.

The open end of the trap should fit snugly into the tunnel openings.

-SET: the traps and place back to back, with each trap facing the tunnel openings. *Make sure the "Spring Bar" is still free to spring.

-PACK: loose dirt around base of trap and edges where trap meets the tunnel opening. You want the traps to be a patch of the MAIN RUNWAY

-COVER: the whole project with a board, a box, a garden sheet or other material.

Celebrate

3.

-Check: the next morning. You should have your gopher.

-Offer: your fresh kill to scavengers in an open space.

*If the trap is stuffed with dirt, reset the traps.

*If traps are untouched, wait a few days, checking each day

Still no gopher? Start over.

By Elaine Petschek in the fond memory of her gopher-hunting father Albert Petschek

solitary, very territorial, and have fairly large territories. I learned about their burrow design, which made it clear why asphyxiation or bad smelling methods don't work. ALSO: I learned that gophers are not all bad. They help to irrigate the soil, prevent erosion, and slightly fertilize the soil. Keeping in mind these good effects, I allow them all the territory outside my garden area and leave them to the snakes and coyotes.

Ever since, I've had nothing but good luck trapping gophers, using the method described by one of the experts. I rarely fail. I've illustrated my method in the accompanying graphic. Good luck, and be sure to offer your catch to our scavengers! 🐾

SUDS & SHOWS 2019

Join us every other Thursday this summer to watch movies in the planetarium and enjoy beer or wine from Pajarito Brewpub and Grill!

JULY 11: 2001: A Space Odyssey

JULY 25: Dirty Dancing

AUGUST 8: Shaun of the Dead

August 22: The Cabin in the Woods

Movies start at 7 PM. Doors open at 6 PM.
Bring a picnic to enjoy outside before the show!

SEE YOU AT THE BEAR FESTIVAL!

Saturday, August 24
10 AM - 2 PM



Plus, join us on August 23 for the Bear
Buffet dinner!

Tickets at peecnature.org

Our Mission: Enriching people's lives by strengthening their connections to our canyons, mesas, mountains, and skies.

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Field Trip Fun

"We couldn't have asked for a more enjoyable and educational experience. All the staff were so patient. As always, the planetarium was the highlight of the trip."

— Dixon Elementary Kindergarten Teacher

Nature Center

Hours:

Monday: 10-4

Tuesday: 10-8

Wednesday: 10-4

Thursday: Closed

Friday: 10-4

Saturday: 10-4

Sunday: 1-4

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*These two made a stop at the microscope during the Earth Day Festival to take a look at nature up close.
(Photo by Thomas Graves)*

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FEATURED EVENTS

- Los Luceros Birding Trip **JULY 6**
Electric Vehicle Show at ScienceFest **JULY 13**
Dorothy Hoard Butterfly Count **JULY 27**
Geology & Art: White Place Field Trip **AUG. 17**
Eat like a Bear Buffet Dinner **AUG. 23**
Bear Festival **AUG. 24**
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