Roy Turley, 4-H agent in Clark County, was moving at lightning speed, darting around the dining hall at the North Central 4-H Camp near Carlisle, grinning, and definitely on high octane. "We’re gonna keep you hopping," he promised the kids.

Then Turley turned to their teachers. "Are we ready?" They were.

The fourth and fifth graders from Clark County’s Fannie Bush Elementary School were ready, too—to learn about creatures that live in water, other animals in the forest, and pioneer foods. And to sit around a campfire, eat s’mores, and sleep in a cabin.

During a year’s time about 3,500 Kentucky students attend an environmental camp much like this one. Most of those kids go to camp at North Central, but others go to environmental camps or outdoor leadership programs at the West Kentucky, J.M. Feltner, and Lake Cumberland 4-H camps.

Robinson Forest, the University’s 14,800-acre research and educational forest in southeastern Kentucky, also is available for environmental camps. Each year about 1,000 school kids take advantage of its natural resources.

For the camps, much of the schedule is planned at the county level so that it will dovetail with the schools’ curriculum needs. But some of the activity may be pure fun.

Some Fayette County schools’ environmental classes also slip in recreation, because some of these kids have never been in a canoe their whole lives or never shot a bow," said Jennifer Lynn, environmental education specialist, who coordinates activities at North Central Camp.

Whatever they do, they love it.

"When we ask the fifth graders at the beginning of the year what they want to do, they say ‘4-H Camp!’" said Misty Lynch, a teacher at Fannie Bush.

These camps are just one of the ways the College’s extension program helps kids learn outdoors. Here are some of the others:

COMMUNITY-BASED SCIENCE
Middle and high school students are carrying out scientific research, much of it outdoors, in community-based science programs. Extension faculty and staff from across the College assist with the project.

"They’re learning how to solve a problem. They’re behaving like real scientists," said Carol Hanley, director of education and communications for the Tracy Farmer Center for the Environment. The center, which works through the College of Agriculture, coordinates this project. Some students, like those in Mary Beth Rouse’s biology class at Woodford County High School, are collecting Asian lady beetles to monitor how they’ve been affected by a recently-discovered fungus that could kill this beneficial insect.

Others are tracking Eastern tent caterpillars. These insects have been linked to Mare Reproductive Loss Syndrome, which caused significant fetal losses to horses in Central Kentucky in 2001 and 2002. Other students are studying water quality, invasive species, or fence problems in horse pastures.

This year, 13 schools across the state are taking part in these outdoor research programs. The number goes up every year.

TREES AND BUGS
Every June for more than 50 years, the College has taken 30 to 35 kids to Jabez for the Kentucky Forest Leadership Program. The program is open to applicants who are rising juniors and se-
Preserving rural integrity is what citizens want," said DJ. Scully ('97 in forestry, '03 in education) Campbell County extension agent for natural resources and environmental management. Extension runs the center, and more than half of its free-of-charge programs are for kids.

Scully has taught Girl Scouts about plants, parochial school students how to fish, first graders about pumpkins, fifth graders how to build a birdhouse, and prepped a high school academic team about natural resources. And that's just a sampling.

A lot of fourth graders come to the center for a fall environmental day camp, since science knowledge is first tested in Kentucky schools at the fourth grade level. "We can do anything," Scully said, talking about the possibilities for environmental learning at the center, "but we try to meet core curriculum needs."

The center is also used by 4-H groups.

AN EXPERIENCE NOT FORGOTTEN

People in the College who work with kids outdoors speak with near-reverence about what an outdoor learning experience does for young people—or anybody.

"There are certain things you learn only by being outside," Scully said. "You can put your hands in the soil of a wetland. You can smell a flower."

Lynn said that when you couple the outdoor experience with an overnight stay, "you've lived here."

"It's more of a feeling that it's home," she said. "You've shared it with the animals, the plants, the stars, the trees. You bear owls. Something magical happens, I think. There's a stewardship (of the land) when you've stayed here."

And that's just inside the building. Outside, there are 50 acres with a lake, trails, wetlands, native grasses, woods, lake, and gardens for butterflies and wildlife.

The program costs less than $200 for the week.

For years, the Kentucky Forest Leadership Program was geared to trees, soils, wildlife, and water quality. About three years ago, a forest entomology track was added, so now kids can opt to learn about insects and how they fit into the forest's ecosystem. Some classes, such as learning how to use GPS, are held jointly for both tracks.

"By experiencing the great outdoors with professionals, they gain an understanding of it," said Doug McLaren, area extension specialist in forestry, who works with a team of extension professionals to put on the program. "There's very little instruction but a lot of investigating," McLaren said. "They find out things they haven't thought about before."

"We keep 'em busy until 11 o'clock and beyond every night," said Blake Newton, 4-H/youth entomology extension specialist. "They eat it up. They'll say 'Can we stay a second week?""

A BUILDING, A SPACE

The Campbell County Environmental Education Center is in A.J. Jolly Park in southern Campbell County. It exists because, in 1998, an extension district board worked with county government to create it—a 50-acre oasis in for outdoor learning in the middle of one of Kentucky's urban centers. The building was financed by a special extension district tax and was finished in 2002.

At first, you can hardly believe it. One side of the building is a glassed-in wall, a bird blind where a kid can go nose to nose with a nuthatch. Solar panels outside cut energy costs and are an easy launch into teaching kids about solar energy or the power of the sun.

Kids can make a possum's footprint in some re-usable gummy paste or use puzzle pieces to figure out what a red oak, yellow poplar, or a dozen other Kentucky trees look like.

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