

# Trading in the present for the past

*Buckskinners gather for a rendezvous with a bygone era*

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**CYNTHIA BEAUDETTE**

*of the Muscatine Journal*

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MUSCATINE, Iowa – People who chanced upon a unique gathering of like-spirited individuals at Wild Cat Den State Park this weekend may have wondered if they somehow slipped back in time.

The annual Buck Skinner Rendezvous, which was set up in the upper camping area of the park, was filled with teepees, buckskin lodges and the aroma of roasting meat and fry bread.

Those who called the rendezvous home this weekend brought their favorite component of the early American fur trapping era and described their craft to visitors.

The only qualification one needs for becoming a buckskinner is a respect and wonder for a relatively short-lived era when fur trading was a booming business in the United States.

Buckskinner Ralph Jeambey said fur came into great demand when the English took a great liking to beaver hats in the early 1800s. That country's affection for the head wear continued until 1840 and its popularity lured trappers to the Rocky Mountains where beaver were more plentiful.

Once a year, trappers and the native American Indians would gather in one area to trade their furs for needed supplies and luxuries.

"They'd get everything they needed for the year and go back into the mountains to trap," said Dale Frazier, a buckskinner and mountain man from Ollie. "Many of the trappers married into American Indian tribes."

Jim Mathias, who became a buckskinner about 30 years ago, said the new age of buckskinning gained popularity during the 1980s.

Mathias said the gathering

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# Buck

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at the rendezvous included people from all walks of life including school teachers, professors and medical professionals.

Jeambey said some people enjoy a rendezvous on the weekend to join others who identify with the historical lifestyle. Others earn a living by selling their handcrafted wares at the events.

The items for sale included hand-beaded items, animal skins, arrow heads, candy, drums, leather moccasins, homemade jams, soaps and clothing. Blacksmithing was also demonstrated.

“When we invite pilgrims the kids learn so much,” said Connie Colberg, a medical professional at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics who is a storyteller at rendezvous. Colberg, who is one quarter Lakota Indian, says the buckskinner lifestyle holds a deep attraction for her.

“I’ve always liked fringe,” she said, showing her buck-



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**Stephanie Stammer checks the cooking pots outside the teepee her husband Todd Stammer set up at the Buck skinner Rendezvous at Wild Cat Den State Park this weekend.**

skin dress. “I feel so comfortable here.”

“We want to live the lives of our ancestors,” Frazier said.

Stephanie Stammer said this is the first year she’s attended a rendezvous. She joined her husband, Todd Stammer, who has been a buckskinner for many years. Stephanie said she’ll return

next year.

“It’s very relaxing,” she said.

Jeambey said the rendezvous is always the third week of September.

To learn more about the buckskinner tradition contact Jeambey at 263-7430 or Mathias at 263-0558. Cynthia Beaudette can be reached at 563-263-2331 (ext. 323) or by e-mail at [cynthia.beaudette@muscatinejournal.com](mailto:cynthia.beaudette@muscatinejournal.com)