

# ACTIVITIES, TIPS AND EVENTS FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

A photograph showing a person's legs from the knees down, wading through a shallow, fast-moving creek. The person is wearing blue shorts with a white and blue patterned waistband. The water is splashing around their legs, creating white foam. A wooden stick is visible on the right side of the frame, partially submerged in the water.

# Rediscover the Joy of Creek Walking

The pair of soft, blue eyes peered deep into the gin-clear depths of the tiny pool, straining to make out anything that wasn't rock or rubble. Not even a decade old, those eyes were young and fresh and untested—yet the vibrant, cheeky 10-year-old worked them like a hawk eyeing its next meal. And with a quick thrust of her net into the knee-deep water, she brought up her “treasures” from the deep.

“Daddy, daddy, I finally caught one,” she screamed, as if she had just opened up that coveted iPod at Christmas. “It’s a big one. Can I keep it?”

This meandering, rippling stream was not unlike the one I spent countless summer days on growing up in central Iowa. And the excitement of search and discovery spilling from the leggy, athletic 10-year-old was no different than what I felt three decades earlier.

Flipping rocks, hoping that when the ripples settled, a plump crawdad would still be hiding underneath. Swooping dip nets through the water, thrilled that one time out of a hundred a minnow was trapped inside. Marveling at the “water skeeter” that so quickly and gracefully disappeared before my eyes. Wondering what overhanging tree branch the vociferous bullfrog was hiding under. Smelling the nearby prairie flowers blossoming in the summer sun. Soaking up the golden warm rays of the sun. Forgetting that chores awaited me at home. Being a kid.



Some 30 years later, I find myself reliving those days, through the youthful eyes of four young kids, who thought surely “Dad” would never allow such an activity, and who had just discovered that he actually encouraged it. When the calendar advances and the mercury rises, I hear four young voices pleading, “When can we go creek walking? That fish looks just like the one I caught in the creek. Can we pick raspberries along the creek again? Can we take the dog to the creek this year?”

So ditch the Xbox, don the dirty tennis shoes and dive into a “relic” of a pastime that will draw on ancient memories and make new ones. Take the kids on a creek walk. Just leave the video games at home.

#### **MAKE IT SAFE**

- Wear plenty of waterproof sunscreen and a hat
- Wear shoes or water socks for easier walking and to protect against sharp rocks and debris
- Walk only in stretches where the stream floor is visible
- Pack drinking water and snacks for longer journeys
- Pack towels and extra clothes for a dry ride home

#### **MAKE THE MOST OF IT**

- Keep a look out for artifacts, fossils, bones and antlers
- Pick up trash along the way, or organize a stream cleaning day
- Become a certified volunteer water quality monitor and help protect your stream. See [www.iowadnr.net](http://www.iowadnr.net).