

Seeing Fun In Science

Parks series offers kids a fresh perspective on how world works

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OGDEN — Budding scientist Takoda Lancaster spent Monday in the park researching sun spots.

“I like to see how stuff works,” said the Ogden 7-year-old.

A second later, a high squeal came from the kid-sized table set up with microscopes and containers holding live insects. “Ants are disgusting,” concluded a little girl after her first magnified look. The seventh annual Science in the Parks tour began Monday at Lorin Farr Park, and the theme was See It. Today’s theme will be Hear It, followed by Build It on Thursday and Feel It on Friday. Young people, toddler age or older, are invited to come and experiment with science, courtesy of Weber State University. Weekday sessions are from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., and the free fun moves to a new park each week through mid-July.

On Monday, children could experiment with visual illusions to make them think spinning drawings were moving. A table of magnifying lenses had youngsters looking at their parents through seemingly enormous eyes.

Elsewhere, children looked through plastic pipes with clear but subtly grooved plastic on one end, revealing “rainbows” through the homemade spectrometers.

Children wrote their names backward on the shiny side of old CDs and DVDs, then reflected the surface onto white cardboard, to see their names appear forward.

WSU President Chuck Wight, a former University of Utah chemistry professor, was manning the sun-spot station, which let kids see an image of the sun (mostly spotless Monday) on an eyesafe viewing surface.

“Science in the Park is something unique to Weber State,” Wight said as the junior scientists ran off to look at magnified spiders, earwigs and millipedes.

“It gets kids excited about science at a very early age, and one thing leads to another. One dad told me he bought a microscope for his son, and the boy spends hours in the yard, looking at everything.”

Adam Johnston founded the program and runs it with the help of more than a dozen volunteers.

“It keeps kids involved in science during the summer,” said Johnston, a WSU physics professor.

Johnston said no major studies had proven conclusively that children exposed to science early maintain a lifelong interest.

“The thing we do know is that the people who are interested in science are the ones who have had positive experiences with it, which is why we are here today.”

Mike Warby, one of Johnston’s lead volunteers, studies physics at WSU.

“I notice that, when we come back every year, the kids are excited and they tell us they are glad we are back,” she said.

“My favorites are Thursday, for rockets and paper airplanes, and Friday, when we do a Mentos experiment and other activities where kids get messy,” Warby said. “The kids always ask what day their favorite activities will be.”

Donna Finch, of Ogden, brought grandchildren Chase and Indie, ages 6 and 8.

“Indie really likes science,” Finch said. “We came last year, too. We go park to park, so she can do experiments more than once.”

Jill Allen came with 17 students from Edu-Care daycare, where Allen teaches. A few of her students, ages 6 through 11, have special needs.

“They thoroughly enjoy this,” Allen said. “It gives them a chance to have fun, and to socialize and interact with other children.

“When we go back, they are prone to exploring more, and they think all bugs need to be touched. We have to tell them some bugs are nicer than others.”

Megan and David Lancaster watched as budding scientist Takoda moved from station to station.

“It piques his interest,” David Lancaster said. “Takoda likes the hands-on activities, and he likes to see how things work. He always asks to do projects at home.”

Megan Lancaster said home experiments have included making water rainbows, coloring water and mixing cornstarch powder and water to make a solid.

“He’s also made volcanoes at home,” she said. “Science is something he loves to do.”

Science in the Parks continues through Friday at Lorin Farr Park, 769 Canyon Road.

Additional Ogden tour dates and locations are:

- June 17-21, Liberty Park, 751 21st St.
- June 24-28, Monroe Park, 850 30th St.
- July 1-3, Jaycee Park Jaycee Park, 2564 Fillmore Ave. (Note: July 4-5 Holiday)
- July 8-12, Mount Ogden Park, 3144 Taylor Ave.
- July 15-19, West Ogden Park, 751 24th St.

Children to age 18 can arrive at 11:30 p.m. to get a free lunch, provided by the Ogden School District. For more information on Ogden district’s free summer-lunch program and additional serving sites, visit www.ogdensd.org.

For information on Science in the Parks, visit <http://community.weber.edu/ottreach/parks.html>.