

History enthusiasts camp out

Isle a la Cache Preserve home to French voyageurs this weekend

By **BILL WIMBISCUS**

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ROMEDEVILLE – Re-enactor Everett Andrus went all out for the Island Rendezvous at Isle a la Cache Preserve on Saturday.

He wore pants. And a shirt.

Andrus, who portrays a French voyageur – a fur trader who traveled by canoe – said most traders typically went native except on special occasions.

“I’m wearing my best clothes today for the rendezvous,” joked Andrus, of Romeoville. “Out in the wilderness, voyageurs would wear next to nothing, just a loin cloth.”

Andrus spent the morning whittling the bark off an osage walking stick with a period “crooked knife” made of horn, leather and an old saw blade. His re-enactment group, the Southwest Brigade, would give paddling demonstrations in their enormous canoes later in the afternoon.

Elsewhere, re-enactors were busy with demonstrations of falconry, trading, tomahawk throwing and other French and Native American crafts and games.

Mark Pfeiffer, of Glenview, portrayed Owl Dancer, a “winterer,” a trader who lived year-round with the Native Americans, usually by marrying into the tribe.

“Marrying into the tribe had to be a win-win situation,” Pfeiffer told a large group of visitors. “The Indians would

want to have trade goods. The voyageurs wanted someone to trade with.”

The floor of his linen trade tent was covered with the tools of his occupation – trade cloth, blankets, beads, metal pots and cups and plenty of furs.

Winterers acted as a sort of wilderness mail order service, Pfeiffer said. Their stock was brought in yearly by canoe. Whatever they didn’t have could be ordered, although it could take months or years to be delivered.

This weekend is the 31st year of the annual encampment, said Lynne Kurczewski, superintendent of progress and education for the Will County Forest Preserve District. The event celebrates the fur trade era that flourished in the region around 1750, including the French voyageurs, Native Americans, colonists and soldiers from that period.

The weather has been perfect this year, Kurczewski said, and about 400 visitors had already come through by 11 a.m.

“We hope to have about 1,000 people each day,” Kurczewski said. “It’s a good draw for families because everything is free and the re-enactors are so enthusiastic.”

The rendezvous offers a wide range of children’s activities, including games, crafts, face painting, contests and the chance to dress as fur traders. Other events include music, storytelling, nature walks and many demonstrations of wilderness crafts.

Kurczewski said the most

popular events are the falconry demonstration, which will be at 10 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. Sunday, and the Rodney the Younger Magic Show at 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.

Other big draws are the re-enactor contests, which include a skillet toss at 11 a.m., the musket finals at 11 a.m. and the tomahawk throwing contest.

In addition to the re-enactment displays, the event includes several vendors and food for purchase, including turkey legs and pulled pork.

Visitors can tour the [Isle a la Cache Museum](#) for free. Parking is free at the preserve, with additional free parking and a shuttle service from lots west of the museum. The museum is at 501 E. 135th St.

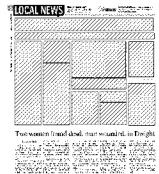
Island Rendezvous runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday. A full schedule of activities can be found online.

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Two women stand behind their wares at the French Island Rendezvous. The event is held at the Isle a la Cache Museum, which is located on the grounds of the Will County Forest Preserve District. The event is free and open to the public.



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Andy Tally (center) watches with other re-enactors during an axe throwing competition during the Island Rendezvous at Isle a la Cache in Romeoville on Saturday. The event allows visitors to experience what life was like for 18th century French fur traders.