

# Wigwam Program *at Rocky Gap State Park*

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**



PHOTO BY MIKE CALHOUN

“WE WANT TO INTRODUCE KIDS AND ADULTS TO  
NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE THROUGH HANDS-ON  
INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS AT ROCKY GAP STATE PARK.”

Roy Brown’s statement summarizes the Wigwam Program at Rocky Gap State Park near Flintstone, Maryland. Roy is President of the Western Maryland Chapter of the Archaeological Society of Maryland, and a trained technological

technician with a passion for pre Columbian life in western Maryland. Roy’s decades of experience and expertise made him a perfect fit for introducing the innovative presentations.



**Roy Brown, President of the Western Maryland Chapter of the Archaeological Society of Maryland, prides himself on creating artifacts in the traditional way of Native Americans, using authentic methods and tools of their time period.**



**The Keyser House is an oval shaped, wigwam-style shelter dating from the AD 1400s and would have been located within a large palisaded village. Keyser is the name given to a culture that lived in this region during the 15th and 16th centuries. The name comes from the Keyser Farm in Virginia where a type of pottery was found, defining the culture group.**

**This house was made using authentic materials as would have been found and constructed by Native Americans. Sapling tree limbs were inserted into the earth, bending them over and binding them with cordage to form a dome shaped frame. It was then covered with sheets of bark, mats and animal hides. A hearth would have been located in the center of the house for cooking and warmth.**

*PHOTOS COURTESY ROCKY GAP STATE PARK*

Sarah Milbourne, Rocky Gap Park Manager, recalled, “I had an interest in archaeology, even when I was young. So, in 2015 Roy and I met to discuss the possibilities about introducing archaeology to park patrons. Roy suggested the park allow him to build a wigwam that would serve as the center of activities. We could schedule programs that featured the culture and resources of Eastern Woodland indigenous peoples.”

According to Sarah, Roy previously surveyed sections of Rocky Gap for evidence of Native American occupation and artifacts. “Roy was instrumental in documenting that Native Americans regularly traveled through the gorge area of our park. He also surveyed the Evitts Homesite — that is where the first European settler lived in what

became Allegany County. With Roy’s expertise, it was exciting to introduce the Wigwam Program. It has been a great partnership since the beginning.”

In the Spring of 2015, Roy, Brent Chippendale and Francis Bridges, members of the Archaeological Society, began the construction of an authentic wigwam nestled in the group campground, poles and bark were provided by the Park. Rico Neuman, an elder of the Chiptico Band of the Piscataway Indian Nation, conducted a traditional blessing ceremony on site. The wooden structure, typical of those found in the northeast section of the continent, features pole framing and a bark exterior that is extremely resilient and effective against rain. All materials employed in the construction were the same that would have been used during the time period.



PHOTO COURTESY ROCKY GAP STATE PARK

Roy’s program is hands-on and interactive for all ages, but children are especially attentive learning about Native American culture.

Artifacts featured here are all reproductions made by Roy in the authentic style of the time period — Gourds for holding water, dipper and rattle, bone saw with serrated edge for harvesting cattails, bark gathering basket with a variety of uses, and hafted knives with bone and wood handles.

ARTIFACT PHOTOS  
BY LANCE C. BELL



Roy provides campers with hands-on explanations of construction techniques and the importance of local resources, particularly plants and their uses in daily life. According to Roy, “Audiences have ranged from pre-schoolers to senior citizens.”

Locating and recording Native American sites is the work of archeologists who employ sophisticated techniques. Public explanations and interpretations of those sites makes for interesting camp conversations, and Roy’s description of how the Native American structures can be identified is a key part of the program.

“Wooden poles were inserted in the ground to create a framework for the outer layer of bark. When the house was abandoned, the wooden poles decayed and darker soil from above filled in the hole, leaving dark stains. In that way we know the size and shape of their houses. Inside the houses there were also necessary features, like the hearth.”

Campers put the finishing touch on the house by fashioning a feather flag that is prominently displayed.



**Left: The Wigwam program has had audiences ranging from pre-schoolers to senior citizens and can accommodate large and small groups.**

*PHOTO COURTESY ROCKY GAP STATE PARK*

**Below: Traditional hand-made woven basket and cattail leaf doll.**

*PHOTOS BY LANCE C. BELL*



Cattails, an important and readily available plant for all native groups, are distributed to campers. As Roy explains, “Cattails not only provided food, but the plant also had alternative uses. Cords, mattresses, toys, and other goods were made possible by cattails.” Campers test their handicraft skills by twisting the plant into cordage.

The Wigwam program typically ends with Roy’s recounting of a legend that captures the spirit of the historical setting — One of Roy’s favorites is “How the Beaver Got His Tail.”

Reflecting on seven years of the Wigwam Program, Sarah is quick to give Roy credit. “We are fortunate to have Roy partner with Rocky Gap through the summer months. Our patrons love the stories and participation activities. Join Roy as he highlights the culture of the American Indian at the Eastern Woodland wigwam in 2022! His program is offered **monthly from June to September**. Check out the “Friends of Rocky Gap” Facebook page for posting of dates and times!

Roy is equally excited with the events. “I appreciate the park and the opportunity to interpret what life was like for Native Americans and to address stereotypes that we often see and hear.”

***Rocky Gap State Park is located along Interstate 68 (12500 Pleasant Valley Road) in Allegany County, Maryland, and encompasses 3,000 acres of public land. In addition to the wigwam, Rocky Gap offers a variety of childrens’ events, hiking trails, fishing, swimming, an aviary, crafting demonstrations and special events — please see the following list of Fall 2021 Events.***

## *Fall 2021 Rocky Gap Events*

### **Sept. 25th, 2021 – YMCA Dragons on the Lake**

The Dragons On The Lake Festival is the premier sporting event of the year! Participants rave about the excitement, diversity, friendly competition, and community spirit surrounding the event. Teams of all ages, skill levels, sizes and shapes take part. This all-inclusive event is the ultimate team building sport — requiring rhythm and finesse rather than brawn to succeed. Learn more at [www.ymcadragonsonthelake.com](http://www.ymcadragonsonthelake.com).

### **Sept. 26th, 2021 – Suicide Prevention & Memorial Walk – 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM**

Join local community members on this walk to bring awareness about suicide prevention and in memorial of loved ones. For more information and registration for this event, please contact UPMC Western Maryland Wellness Center at 240-964-8424.

### **Oct. 23rd, 2021 – Ghouley Hooley Plunge**

Now in its seventeenth year, the Hooley Plunge is the largest single-day fundraising event in Allegany County. While the Hooley Plunge is normally a March event, due

to COVID 19 restrictions, the Plunge is scheduled this year for Saturday, October 23. Annually, hundreds of brave souls run into the frigid waters of Lake Habeeb at Rocky Gap State Park to raise money for the Special Olympics of Allegany County and other local programs benefitting the developmentally disabled. Since the Hooley Plunge inception, over 1.4 million dollars has been raised. The Hooley Plunge is coordinated by the Alhambra Wamba Caravan #89. More information and registration is available at [hooleyplunge.com](http://hooleyplunge.com).

## HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE EVENTS

### HIIT for Beginners –

**Sept. 1st, 7th, 14th, 21st & Oct. 5th and 12th  
5:30 PM at White Pine Pavilion**

Change up your routine with HIIT for Beginners. This free 45-minute fresh-air class will benefit both your body and your mind. All fitness levels are encouraged, as each move can be adjusted to individual needs. Workouts will be led by UPMC Western Maryland Health Coach and ACE certified personal trainer, Carey Moffatt.

**Yoga – Sept. 13th, 20th, 27th  
5:30 PM at West Beach**

Join Moriah for mind, body, and spirit yoga. Moriah has been teaching yoga and cycling classes along with various other exercise classes at the YMCA for 15 years.

**Happy Feet Happy Trails Family Hikes –  
Sept. 9th (10 AM), Sept. 21st (10 AM & 5 PM)  
and Oct. 7th (10 AM) & Oct. 21st (10 AM & 5 PM)  
– Touch of Nature Parking Lot**

Hike along with UPMC Western Maryland Wellness Center staff to enjoy the outdoors with your whole family! This hike has no set distance and is suitable for all ages.

**Children’s Environmental Health Day –  
Oct. 14th; 4 PM – 6 PM Day Use Area**

Join Park and UPMC Western Maryland Wellness Center Staff to spend an evening enjoying the outdoors and learning about the importance of environmental health. Various activities and events for children will be available!

To subscribe to email announcement of Healthy Parks Healthy People programming, please email Ranger Mollie Kemp at [mollie.kemp@maryland.gov](mailto:mollie.kemp@maryland.gov) or call 301-722-1487.



Fitness walks, yoga, guided family hikes and environmental health are just some of the programs available at Rocky Gap State Park for Fall 2021. PHOTOS COURTESY ROCKY GAP STATE PARK