Bringing the Family Together... One tent at a time

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BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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The Macy family has it down to an exact science.

When the weather warms up above freezing, they head to the shed and start looking through their four containers of camping supplies.

Once the reservations are made at their favorite local campground, Hartwell State Park, they load up their car on Thursday afternoon and are all set to leave when the kids get home from school on Friday.

"We realize that camping has lost a bit of popularity over the years, but we think it's really making a comeback," Patrick Macy, Seneca father of two said. "When I was growing up, we camped a lot as a family. I wanted to carry that tradition on to my own family as well."

With the temperatures slated not to drop below 50 during the day for the next two weeks, the nighttime lows breed the perfect mix of briskness for a roaring campfire.

"It's one of those things that really helps the family bond," he added. "No video games, we put our cells phones away, no television. Just us, the outdoors, some games and food that always tastes extra good cooked over the open fire."

And while gas prices are also slated to increase in the coming months, staying local is getting a firm thumbs up from residents.

"A lot of these campgrounds stay open year-round," he said. "When we went two weekends ago, we saw more people than we ever have before in January. There is nothing like taking a weekend to get away. Even if it's just a short drive from home, it feels like paradise camped out next to the water."

The average cost of renting a campsite in the Upstate runs anywhere from $12 to $25 a night.

"Once you make that step to buy your supplies like a tent, sleeping bags, coolers, lanterns, flashlights and cooking gear, it's really cheap to continue going," he said. "Kids bring their bikes and fishing poles, and everyone is able to do their own thing close by. Our kids feel a little independent while they explore, and we love reading a good book by the fire early in the morning while they are still asleep. It's so relaxing for everyone."



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When it comes to first-timers to the outdoors, Macy recommends patience.

"I always think of my sister growing up," he said. "She hated camping because she was used to the indoors and playing dress up. If you have teens that have never been camping, the first trip may be hard for them. Show some patience but don't give in when they complain about not having their cell phones, music and games. It is important for everyone to know how to interact without technology. Have you ever tried to bond with someone who is always texting? It is impossible. Sitting around the campfire and chatting can be enjoyable and revealing."

So, if you are looking for an inexpensive vacation that gives you the chance to bond with your family, camping is the perfect choice!

TOP TEN REASONS TO CAMP

- **No** technology to interrupt family bonding.
- **When** was the last time you gazed at the stars?
- **Wake** up and smell the outdoors and enjoy the birds' chirping as a calming alarm clock.
- **Make** great family memories.
- **Food** tastes even better.
- **It's** affordable even in a tight economy
- **We** are helping to preserve our historic and beautiful state parks.
- **It's** easy today. Camping equipment continues to change in the light of making things easier with every bit of supplies. Tents no longer take an hour to set up!
- **There** are so many ways to camp, choose what works best for you and your family.
- **Finally,** the experience. Going through life without an appreciation for the outdoors is unfortunate, Macy said.

jsibley@dailyjrn.com | (864) 882-2375



At Hartwell State Park, beautiful views like this await campers year-round. JESSICA SIBLEY | STAFF



The Macy's enjoy camping whenever they get the chance. "Once we made the initial investment, it's such an inexpensive way to really have a great time as a family," Megan Macy said. FOR THE JOURNAL