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The fair-est of 'em all

'Monkey Man' and Muffin perform for fair crowds

By Jen Deselms
Senior Reporter

Children and adults gathered in a circle leaned over as a monkey scurried across their backs.

A small boy stood next to his mother away from the crowd looking scared. She told him not to feel bad; she didn't want a monkey crawling on her back, either.

Children squatted holding nickels and dimes in their palms. The monkey put the change in the pocket of its vest, shook each child's hand and gave some of them a kiss.

Jim Howd's belt buckle says it all. Monkey Man.

Howd and his monkey, Muffin, have performed at state fairs, home and garden shows, Christmas shows, and shopping malls for six years.

Howd and Muffin are performing six shows daily at the Nebraska State Fair. An Akron, Ohio, native, Howd said he and Muffin usually travel to 18 fairs during the summer.

Traveling with a monkey doesn't really cause any problems, Howd said. He and Muffin usually camp when they travel, he said, but when they do, staying in motels is no problem because he keeps Muffin in her cage.

Howd said he became interested in starting a monkey show through his uncle, Robert Howd, who has his own monkey show. Howd's uncle gave Muffin to him, he said. Howd said he taught Muffin all her tricks, but competing with his uncle helped him to teach Muffin new tricks.

"What we'd (Howd and his uncle) do is I'd teach Muffin a new trick and then he'd take his monkey, Pete, and try and teach him a better trick," Howd said.

The competition between Howd and his uncle lasted for about a year, and they both came up with quite a few good tricks, he said.

Howd and his uncle have performed together several times.

"It's (performing together) okay," Howd said, "but we both like to be

the star of the show."

When he and his uncle combine their acts the show gets to be too long, he said.

During shows Muffin dresses herself up to go shopping or take a trip to Mexico, plays basketball and roller skates.

Even when Howd and Muffin aren't performing, people stop to talk, ask questions, or just look. A young couple with a small child stopped to watch Howd and Muffin as they took a break between shows.

"Look at him (Muffin). He has a diaper on," the man said.

Minutes later a woman stopped to tell Howd how much fun monkeys are and that she used to have one.

Even though Muffin couldn't answer questions during a recent interview, she made her presence known. The curious monkey occupied herself with a sucker or whatever was handy. After looking through this reporter's notebook she stole a pen and autographed a page.

Family hoofs it to fair the old-fashioned way

By Jen Deselms
Senior Reporter

Marquette is about 80 miles from Lincoln, but it took UNL graduate Barry Denning and his family a little more than four days to complete the trip. Barry, who graduated from UNL in 1976 with degrees in electrical and mechanical engineering, his wife Denise, their children Justin, 6, and Denae, 4, and a group of horseback riders began their trip Aug. 25, and arrived on Aug. 29 for the opening day of the Nebraska State Fair.

The trip to the state fair and the covered wagon display at the fair were to make people aware of Timberlake Ranch Camp, a Christian camp in Marquette.

The Central City farm family volunteered to ride in the covered wagon because they thought it sounded like fun, they said.

The sight of a covered wagon traveling on Nebraska highways caused many different reactions from people in passing cars, the Dennings said. Some people stopped and took pictures. Others didn't even look, Barry said.

"You find out that some people are so busy, so wrapped up in their own world that they can't share somebody else's world," he said.

The Dennings said they also met many friendly people during their trip. The amount of attention they received increased after they appeared on Channel 10/11 news. People honked their horns, flashed

their headlights and waved as they passed the wagon, Barry said.

"We'd meet a school bus full of kids and you'd see about 50 faces plastered up against the window looking out," he said.

The Dennings entertained themselves by singing and talking to the outriders, Denise said. Denise said she and the children would sometimes get out of the wagon and walk for a while. The outriders passed the time by roping weeds on the side of the road, she said.

The children never took a nap, Barry said. The trip was unusual for them so they stayed awake and watched the scenery, he said.

"It's amazing what all you can see at three miles an hour that you can't at 50," Barry said.

Scientists stumble upon rare fossils in Lake McConaughy

By Janis Lovitt
Staff Reporter

What started out as a fun scuba dive for four scientists more than a year ago has turned into one of the most significant fossil discoveries in Nebraska's history.

UNL Paleontology and Parasite Department members George Corner, Greg Brown and Martha Nelson and Seward High School science teacher Jim Landon decided to combine their hobbies

of scuba diving and their interest in fossils by diving in Lake McConaughy last August.

There had been several reports of fossil findings on the beaches of the lake, so when someone suggested that the group get together and dive for fun, they chose Lake McConaughy.

Brown, chief preparator in the research division of the State Museum, said the divers were surprised with what they found during that first dive. There were more fossils buried there

than they had expected, he said.

Those early findings spurred interest in the fossil beds of Lake McConaughy. In August, the original scuba diving team, returned to the site for another exploratory dive.

After five days of diving, the team surfaced fossils that were nine million years old. More importantly, one out of every 10 fossils they found were meat-eating animals' bones. Michael Voorhies, curator of vertebrate paleontology at the museum, said the remains of meat-eaters tend to be rare in the fossil record. Usually only one bone in 100 will belong to a carnivore.

It is still a mystery why there are so many carnivorous bones in Nebraska, Voorhies said, but the museum staff with the help of other state paleontology clubs will continue researching the finds.

See **FOSSILS** on 7

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Shorts

The National Student Congress in Boulder, Colo., has designated the week of Sept. 22 as a week of Student Action for Education and Voter Registration.

Issues in Washington D.C., include the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Tax Reform Bill, legislation on Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, the budget, sanctions against South Africa and Senate consideration of the nomination of William Rehnquist to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

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