

# School is out. Summer is here.



PHOTO BY JOSHUA BESSEX

**Above:** Amelia Hillard, of Astoria, uses a net to catch bugs last summer at Netul Landing in Lewis and Clark National Historical Park. The park, which includes Fort Clatsop, offers a Junior Ranger activity book for children and also hosts events with children's activities.



FILE PHOTO

**Right:** There's always places to explore, castles to build, games to play and picnics to eat on the beach.

*Ditch the screens, and have fun with your kids this season old-school style*

By DWIGHT CASWELL

**M**y childhood was long ago and quite different from those of today. My friends and I played sports, but not in leagues, and we also did safe, constructive things. Like teasing a neighbor's bull or making our own fireworks. Okay, maybe it's a miracle we survived, and perhaps it's a good thing that times have changed, but do children today have to lead exhaustively organized lives that seem to be the norm?

The kid I hang out with now is my 3-year-old grandson, Eli, and with him I like to do the things I did as a boy. The less dangerous activities, that is. Eli consulted on this article, and here are some of the things we like to do best. Note that all of them involve little or no money or organization and do not require cell phones.

Beaches always rate high on Coast Weekend's annual Readers' Choice Awards contest and with good reason. Who doesn't like a beach? There are things to collect, places to dig or to make castles, games to play, driftwood forts to build, and picnics to be consumed. And Eli's best canine friend, Mojo, is welcome. We have our favorites — Hug Point, Short Sand and Gearhart's Little Beach — but if there's sand, water and sun you can hardly go wrong.

A big part of the fun at Short Sand, located in Oswald West State Park, is the half-mile trail from parking lot to beach. Our other regional parks have a lot to offer as well. Fort Stevens State Park has Battery Russell, the Peter Iredale shipwreck and the only Civil War-era earthen fort on the West Coast. There is something for everyone: various military re-enactments, a military museum, lots of trails for hiking and biking, and beaches for birding and whale watching.

The Columbia-Pacific region has two other forts that are well worth visiting. There is Fort Columbia, less than a mile north of the Astoria Bridge on U.S. Highway 101, and perhaps the area's