

Pokémon GO-Free Zone

By Jim Turner

The advance team glided around the point, arriving from the south on the rising tide, and drifted to the sandy north side shore. According to plan, the first item taken off the boat was the flag—so our Coast Guard leader proudly did the honors and planted our Stars and Stripes solidly into the sand at the edge of the point. Next came the folding tables, Igloo coolers filled with food, ice and beverages, followed by the charcoal grill, bags of supplies and several colorful umbrellas. Soon the little island was ready, and we declared ownership, at least for that morning. Then our captain boarded his boat and retraced the route to home base and to the crowd of waiting settlers eager for a ferry ride back to the camp and to the anticipated festivities. Still others of us arrived from points west and north, bringing our own personal contributions to the happening, and the beachhead was soon filled with a joyous band of geriatric revelers. It was party time.

What now seems to have evolved into an annual event came together this year on the third Saturday of July when about 25 folks gathered at the secret land mass for our summer sandbar party. Most of the members of the crowd were experienced enough, or just plain lucky enough, to avoid getting stuck on the shoals, and we arrived with both our dignity and our appetites. Some of the gang members were virgins to the sandbar experience, and their excitement was nothing short of contagious. The few younger members of the group gladly offered hands to the less agile, boosting the unsteady souls with creaky joints and troubled muscles up and out of boats and helping to make steady those early steps in the soft sand.

We were a grand troop, adorned with big brimmed hats, our bodies protected by gaily colored cover-ups and tees that displayed bawdy slogans. The small areas of our bodies that remained uncovered and exposed to Sol were slathered in UV-70 lotions. But the most memorable and the most glorious part of the whole sandbar scene was the array of wide smiles and the beautiful laughter resounding from the cluster of friends. I was reminded of that scene from the 1975 movie "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" in which Jack Nicholson "borrowed" a bus and took the inmates for a joy ride.

Many, if not most, of us brought our smart phones so we could record the memories that otherwise would morph into something different. Some folks were even bold enough to post real-time scenes to Facebook to share with friends absent from the 2016 edition of the beach party. The best I could tell, no one was searching for a Pokémon GO site. Different strokes for different folks, as somebody once said.

According to my grandson's phone app, there were multiple Pokémon creatures hanging out in Atlantic Station. I picked up Marshall from camp at the local aquarium one day in late July and, at his request, brought with me his iPhone with the Pokémon GO app already open and ready for him. My plan was to hit the AB Ice Cream store for two scoops of healthy dairy on a big waffle cone. Since our little buddy loves Subway, we'd planned to stop there and get more delicacies for his dinner and round out the adventure with a visit

ON THE GRILL

Grill Cooking Tools

By John Clarke

Choose the right tools for the job

Choosing cooking tools that are specifically designed for the outdoor grill can improve the overall outcome of your grilling experience. In all likelihood, your favorite indoor utensils are not suited to cooking on the grill and may result in compromising your personal safety and food quality. A few thoughts on the basics:

Spatulas come in all sizes and shapes, but you will need to find one that has a long blade to allow easy flipping or moving of large or delicate foods. The best choice will be a spatula that has a firm handle, most likely made of wood, with the blade running the length of the handle. Grill stores will have many to choose from and even stores such as Walmart or Lowes might have what you need. A check at big box stores or on the internet may also produce good results.

The second tool I like to have handy is a set of **long-handled tongs**. You can find many options, but ones that are about as long as your spatula will be suitable. The length of these tools is important in preventing burns to your arms. A short tool in the 14 to 16-inch range from your kitchen might work directly over the fire, but a longer version will be necessary for your overall cooking.

to Food Lion for bread, milk, blueberries and salty potato chips. I mean the kind cooked in oil and with extra salt. You must understand that this is my one and only grandson and it is my duty to see to it that he learns to make good decisions about his food choices in order to grow into a strong, healthy young man. I think we did okay.

I signed the form at the aquarium to collect Marshall, and when he had been released for the afternoon I asked "How was camp?" "Good," he said; "Did you bring my phone?" From that moment on in the car he was quite animated and repeatedly shouted such comments as "yeah," "ah, man," "dang-it," and "Straight up ahead, Poppy. There's a site in Atlantic Station. I don't have that character. Man! There is a gym!" So I was forced to play along with a game that was alien to me. I don't understand the goal of the Pokémon adventure. I don't know the characters, how to keep score or even if scoring is a part of the whole concept. As I learned from Marshall and then verified with Google, there is a collection of weird creatures. Pikachu, Charizard, Abra, Pinsir, Squirtle and Porygon are just a few of the names I found. Someone has determined that the most popular character in our state is Eevee. What is a little disturbing is that naming one's child after a Pokémon character is currently the "in thing." I hope I don't get a grandchild named Pinsir.

Some of these guys are nautical, others are landlubbers and still others fly. Each is determined to have a certain level of power, which is given a numerical value. These values cause the creatures to be either vulnerable or dominant. When two or more of these dudes meet in the same space (a gym), they do battle and the one with the higher power apparently wins the duel and claims the gym as his/her own. The winner then stands ready to defend against others. Got it? It sounds a little like life.

Okay, so here is my not-very-detailed summary of Pokémon GO. The first step is to download the app on your smart phone or other device. This action might take multiple attempts before you are successful because a minimum of 300 million others are trying to do the same thing at the same time. Once the application has downloaded to your screen, you can begin the chase to possess as many of these aforementioned characters as possible. You accomplish this by walking from place to place with your nose stuck on your phone or, if you're lucky enough to have me as your grandfather, you will be driven in an erratic manner as we seek out the treasures. To be fair, it is a clean, wholesome game that is getting kids outside and causing them to be active. They are truly engaged in the hunt and share these exploits with their friends. The risks of walking into signposts or in front of a moving bus are real, and that does seem to aggravate the whole process.

I have begun making our plans for next year's sandbar party by creating a sign. It will be the second item off the boat, following the flag, and it will be erected in the same general area as Old Glory. The design will be a white background, 36 inches square, which displays a red circle with a diagonal stripe. Inside the circle will be the words "Pokémon GO-Free Zone." In smaller letters beneath the circle will be printed the words "Cell Phones for Camera Use Only." I'm already looking forward to the next trip.

Gloves, mittens or pot holders are another must-have since you may need to touch the food, grill surface or an item on the grill (such as a cast iron pot). If you have a hot fire (over 500 degrees), simply opening a ceramic-style cooker could cause a burst of fire as a rush of oxygen meets the hot coals. You may also want to have **food-safe gloves** to handle meat that you are planning on "pulling" (such as a Boston butt), as they will keep your hands cleaner and help to prevent tools from slipping out of your grip.

A **grill cleaning tool** for before or after a cook is also a necessity. Many of the scrapers have a steel brush or pad to assist in the cleaning process, which is great, but you will want to be sure to wipe your grill with either an **oiled folded paper towel or a soft cloth**. Though not well documented, there have been reports of steel fibers being found in food and ingested, with the result being a trip to the emergency room. See cbsnews.com/news/grill-barbecue-metal-brush-dangers to learn more about this risk.

At any rate, if you do not clean your grill when you finish cooking, be sure to heat it up to burn off the residue before starting a new cook. As it burns down and the smoke diminishes, run your tool over the grate, and flip it over to get the underside as well. You could add a step and use a wet brush to sweep over the grill top, but always wipe it down well, and you should be all set. If you are using a wire tool, make sure it is not too worn or coming apart—a sure sign it needs to be replaced.

There are also all-wood tools (oak blocks) that are long and flat. The hot grill will eventually burn grooves into the wood, creating a safe and easy-to-use cleaning tool.

After you finish cooking, you can allow a charcoal grill to continue to operate with the vents opened and the lid closed to burn off the grill and keep it clean. If you use this technique with a gas grill, be sure to remember to turn it off so you don't allow it to run all night and go through an entire tank of propane. Determine the best method for cleaning your grill and stick to it.

(Continued on page 29)