One of our favorite things about geocaching is that it takes us to some wonderfully obscure locations. Another thing we love is that geocaching allows us to learn a lot about plants and animals along the way. Although our most recent adventure was not geocaching-related, it still had the elements of going somewhere the average person doesn't get to see and learning something new that opened our eyes.

I don't know about you, but when I think of the Tyson Research Center along Highway 44 at Antire Hill, I've always pictured two-headed Tyson chickens running around behind that high-security fence. What you may not know is that, nestled in the middle of the Tyson Research area, are 63 acres devoted to the Endangered Wolf Center (formerly known as the Wild Canid Survival and Research Center) founded by Marlin Perkins. (You know, the guy from *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom,* and former director of the St. Louis Zoo.)

For L Frank's birthday, I signed us up for one of the Wolf Center's monthly Wolf Howls. We were given a 15-minute window to be at the Tyson Research Center gate, where someone would let us in and give us instructions on where to go. Pulling up to the gate after dark, we were surprised by the number of cars waiting to go in. We took our place in line, and eventually the gates opened and the cars were allowed in one by one.

The woods were pitch-black on either side of us as we drove about a mile and a half, where we were directed to park along the side of the road. Then we got out of our cars and walked to a World War II-era munitions bunker where the event was to begin. The inside of the bunker was set up with a presentation screen, chairs, information on the animals at the Wolf Center, and even a little gift shop. We were served wine and cheese before taking a seat.

The event began with a Wolf Center employee giving a presentation on the wolves and other endangered species living there. The red wolf, we were told, used to roam Missouri but was almost completely exterminated in the 1800s and early 1900s. By the 1930s, only two packs remained in the wild.

The mission of the Wolf Center (www.endangeredwolfcenter.org) is to provide an "alternative to extinction" for hundreds of wolves and other endangered canids through education, behavioral and reproductive research and carefully managed breeding. The work done there has been responsible for successful reintroduction programs for the Mexican gray wolf and the

red wolf.

After the presentation, our group was invited to walk down a gravel road with our flashlights and call to the wolves to see if they would answer. We had walked a few hundred feet when we all stopped in our tracks at the sound of the wolves starting to howl in the distance. We listened to the sound for a few minutes, trying to imagine the terror that early settlers in Missouri said they felt when they heard the wolves' cry all around them. How could those early accounts be referring to the beautiful, soulful sound we were hearing?

The wolves quieted as suddenly as they had started. One of our guides stayed with us, and the other continued down the road. They were going to each try to howl as if they were lost wolves searching for the pack. First one, then the other guide gave their best rendition of a Mexican grey wolf. I guess the pack wasn't fooled, because only one wolf felt sorry for us and answered. Then our whole group howled on cue, but the wolves must have been laughing at us at that point, since the only answer we got when we listened for a reply was a train whistle in the distance. We felt lucky to have heard them earlier, and left wanting to return for a daylight tour so we could actually get to see them in their habitats. All in all, a fun, educational experience in an area that I would have otherwise never been able to see. What more could a geocacher wish for? Maybe next time I'll spot one of those two-headed chickens.