

Troop 49 – The Pathfinders
Backpacking to Glen Gray, Mahwah , NJ
December 6&7 2008

The small group of day hikers and backpackers met at OLPH at 8:00 AM and were shuttled to Pool Hollow Road off of West Oakland Avenue in Oakland , NJ . The Day hikers included Nick and Scott M, Ryan K, Adam F, and Anthony B. The backpackers included myself (Martin Treich), Matthew and Jim F, Jeevan J, Brendan D, Chris E, and Nicholas B. We took a quick group photo at the start of the Hoeflerlin Memorial trail (yellow blazes) and started at 8:26 AM up the fire road the trail followed. We stayed on the fire road and picked up the trail as it crossed over I-287. We paused on the pedestrian overpass to watch the trucks and cars zoom below us. Some trucks gave us a hearty toot on their horns to greet us. It was a nice view in the cold morning sunshine. We continued our ascent into the Ramapo Mountains on the Hoeflerlin trail to the first overlook point with a view of southern Oakland. The BSA Service Center was due south of us and I-287 directly below us. Potash Lake was to our east and Pompton Lakes was further south. We were all impressed with the views.

Returning to the trail, we headed north on the eastern side of the mountain and passed the intersection with the Lookout Trail at 9:50 AM . By this time we had settled into our hiking rhythm, shed some clothes to regulate our heat to keep the perspiration from building up. The key to comfortable hiking is dressing in layers and regulating perspiration by adding or removing layers. Taking hats and gloves off when we climbed up the hills when we needed to shed heat and putting them back on when we needed to conserve heat was a constant juggling act that kept us busy. When we rested, we quickly had to bundle back up to keep from chilling.

Soon we crossed over to the western side of the mountain top and had fantastic views to the west including Ramapo Lake and the castle ruins to the northwest. We descended and came out on the dam and paused for a few moments to throw stones on the thin ice. The thin ice made interesting chirping noises on the impacts of the stones. This was a new and entertaining experience for the scouts. At the dam we headed west on the MacEvoy Trail (blue blazes) following the shoreline road to the NW corner of the lake. Here we switched to the Castle Point (white blazes) trail and made the steep ascent to the Castle Ruins. Now I have an ear for identifying rotary wing aircraft (helicopters) and was able to predict the approach of a UH-60 Blackhawk with accuracy when it was still out of eyesight. Later I thought the Blackhawk was returning but instead I believe it was a pair of VH-3D which is the Presidential version known as Marine 1 or the Navy version SH-3A. It was difficult to see the paint scheme as they were backlit.

At 11:00 AM we paused for a photo opportunity and some exploration time at the “Castle” on the mountain top. Some Scouts have been to the castle before and for some it was a new experience. The home was built in 1910 by stockbroker, William Porter. His wife lived in the home until 1940. In 1959 vandals torched the vacant home and it has lied it ruins since then. We could definitely take out 100 pounds of trash from this spot. Perhaps Scouts who need hours for their 50 Miler patch would be interested in cleaning up this spot one weekend. Leaving the castle, we headed north to the cistern tower that supplied water to the castle. Here were more

brehtaking views to the west. At this point is where a geo-cache was hid. Geocaching is a worldwide activity where caches, mostly small watertight boxes, are hidden near interesting locations or scenic overlooks. The coordinates are posted on the internet (Geocaching.com) and you search for the box. After about 5 minutes of searching, I spotted it and the Scouts swarmed the rock face to see the cache. The Senior Scouts organized the mayhem and we followed the proper geo-caching etiquette of only taking something once you donate to the box. Matt F took out a South African 20 Rand note (current exchange = \$1.92 USD) and put in a large plastic penny and a small football. Chris E put in a small container of Purell and took out something too. Anthony made the proper entries in the cache log book, sealed the container up, and returned it to the hiding spot. It was quite an exciting adventure for the Scouts. Geocaching will be on the agenda for future trips.

Heading north on Castle Point trail, we turned north onto the Cannonball trail and approached Skyline Drive . There we met Eagle Scout candidate, Jack D, and his father installing one of his last trail signs on his Eagle Project. We chatted for a moment then continued our trek northward. At this time the Scouts were growing weary and our line was stretching out. In looking for a spot for lunch, I always try and find an interesting location so we can explore a little while we relax. The Oakland town compost facility was just ahead and we stopped there for lunch. I told the Scouts that they were most likely the only boys in Oakland who ever got to walk the compost facility as most people do not even know it exists. Very large rows of leaves, some still in bags, stretched a few hundred feet. The last row was beautiful dark rich compost, the fruit of a year or two of work by Mother Nature.

Energized by our lunch break and with the desire to push on to camp, we left the compost facility at 12:46 PM and continued north on the Hoeflerlin trail until we reached the cell tower. Here we took out our compasses and set them to the bearing to the camp. We calculated this bearing at the troop meeting so we did not have to calculate on the trail. We bushwhacked our way down the slope and came out right at our cabin. Amazing,; not quite since I have done this twice before and knew the way pretty well. For the new Scouts, it was a little intimidating stepping off of the trail and walking into the unknown following a little compass needle.

We arrived in camp at 1:22 PM , just less that 5 hours. I predicted our speed would be .9 MPH and I was pretty accurate. This is a measurement to remember; young Scouts with full backpacks over rugged terrain average just under 1 MPH. We started off at about 240' above sea level and peaked at about 1,000 feet near the cell tower for a total ascent of about 760'; a nice bit of exercise for 5 hours.

We settled into Benedict Lodge and had a bit of personnel change. Ryan, Anthony, Adam, Nicholas, and Scott said farewell and Jim B arrived along with Patrick and Rob D. Mike E arrived with the food and troop gear and soon we were settled into the cabin. Scouts managed to light a fire in the wood burning stove and soon we were warm in the cabin. The electric lights and the gas stove were very nice and soon we had hot chocolate and cup-o-noodles to warm us up. We set about our chores of gathering water and cutting fire wood and by nightfall we were very comfortable.

Chris E was the head cook for his 1st class cooking requirements and in keeping with the backpacking theme, all the meals required only hot water. We had Beef Stroganoff and Chicken-n-rice for supper along with endless clementines, Twizlers, cookies, and other staples of Scout trips. After dinner we were greeted by visitors as Troop 369 had a afternoon of activities for the Webelos and following the dinner with T-369, the Webelos and their parents stopped by our cabin for a few minutes. We welcomed them and fed the Scouts Twizlers and some of the men tasted the beef. They soon departed and Rob and Patrick D stayed with us for the night.

The night was spent playing many different games and telling stories and doing one last latrine walk in the cold before turning the lights out a little after 10 PM . It was a long day of exercise and cold air and we were all spent and anxious for bed. The fire place was not very efficient and burned wood at a fast pace so I stoked it full at 10 PM and when I awoke at 12:20 AM it was just glowing goals. I stoked it once more and when I checked it at 3:30 AM , the coals were dull but the wood I loaded in soon caught fire and I could hear the logs crackling inside as I settled back to sleep.

I slept in till 6:40 and checked on the fire which was reduced to coals once more. I decided to lit it die out as we had a Campmaster inspection at 8:30 AM and he wanted a cool fire place by then. At 7:00 AM the Scouts were awoken and the breakfast routine was started with cereal and hot chocolate and we continued to make a dent in the supply of clementines. We all did an excellent job of packing up and cleaning up so we had some time to kill before the Campmaster arrived so we played one more game of cards. I brought out my “flint & steel” and tried to light a fire with one try but failed; it took me 2 tries. Jim B started a fire in one try. Scouts took turns trying to light a fire and some had success. By about 8:40 the Campmaster arrived and checked us out and he was very pleased with the way we left the cabin. We walked down to the cars in the parking lot and by a little after 9:00 AM we were on our way home.

We all enjoyed the trip and practiced our hiking, backpacking, map & compass, and GPS skills. We got to see new sights and have some new adventures and a lot of fun too. Another great Scouting experience.

Recorded December 8, 2008 by Martin Treich, Scoutmaster