

## Troop 49 – The Pathfinders

### Backpacking Trip Report

December 5-6, 2009

#### Pre-trip preparedness

At the troop meeting on December 3, we had a pre-trip meeting which included a backpack shakedown. We went through all the items needed from a packing list, and confirmed that all participants had what they needed for the trip. We also planned our menu for the trip, and Zack took care of getting the food. We also reviewed winter camping techniques since we knew we would be doing “open air” camping, and the weather was calling for “Wintry Mix”.

#### December 5 - 6

We met in the parking lot of Glen Gray at 8AM. The overnight cars parked closer to the dining hall, and the folks who helped shuttle the hikers & backpackers stayed in the “day” parking area. We checked in at the office, and informed the staff that we would be backpacking in to camp from the north along the Schuber Trail which is blazed with orange markers. Mr. Z. and Mr. F. were there to meet us, and brought the pathfinder Geocache with all of its finishing touches and adornments. The group was shuttled up to the Ramapo Reservation county park, where we said our goodbyes, saddled up with packs, and headed off for our hike. We identified different scouts to be the “point person” and lead us to the each stopping point. All scouts who took on this responsibility performed this task well, and we never missed an intersection. These scouts included Nick, Chris, Lucas, and Eric.

The first leg of the hike was to travel up the fire road to McMillan Reservoir. All agreed that this location would make a good first stop because many of us were familiar with the destination and there is enough room for backpackers to stop and make adjustments before the trails thin out. After arriving at the reservoir, we took a minute to explore the work that has been done on the dam, situated our packs, and moved out along the south side of the reservoir. We stayed on the orange trail and kept our eyes open for the different trail intersections. We decided to stop for a regroup where the red/silver trail intersects with the orange trail. This intersection is where the Orange trail makes a turn south. It was also becoming noticeable early on that we had a well-rounded group with no “sprinters” and no scouts who were lagging too far behind, either.

After turning south, the trail runs through a nice glen which runs below a long stretch of elevation to the west. It was along this stretch that we decided to stash the Geocache. Mr. R. took care of taking down the coordinates of the cache, so that we could be sure to have an accurate read. We continued along this portion of the trail which eventually brought us to the intersection Bear Swamp Road and the entrance road to Camp Yaw Paw. We crossed the bridge, and continued south, having to cross a feeding creek.

The next portion of our hike brought on some more elevation. We stopped for a photo at a dilapidated old lean-to, which we figured was too far out of range from Glen Gray and Yaw Paw to be a part of

either camp. Our guess that it was possibly an old hunter's lean-to. Continuing up the Orange trail, we merged with the Yellow trail as we made the elevation to a scenic overlook. By now, there were a few flurries drifting in the air. Scouts were examining the snow flakes, which had symmetrical designs. We stopped for lunch at the scenic overlook, and didn't spend too much time there, because we wanted to keep warm and get to camp before the snow amounted to trouble.

We stayed on the Orange trail until we reached camp. Looking at the odometer on the GPS, we decided to divert to the Green or Old Guard trail, and get to the site. When we arrived at the Mothercroft Pavilion, we had completed 5.1 miles. We said goodbye to our day hikers, and started to set up camp and settle in for the evening.

Mothercroft Pavilion turned out to be a great choice for a site, because it is a pavilion with open air on 3 sides. On the one wall is a fireplace, and to either end of the structure there are two lofts which accommodated all of the campers. There is electricity in the pavilion which allowed us to rely on the lighting provided. There are many picnic tables on the main floor. We set up our kitchen area and started boiling water for hot drinks and gather firewood before the snow started to accumulate. We had 3 of the micro stoves which screw on to the top of the propane/butane mix canisters.

The fireplace was not the most radiant form of heat, but for the 5-6 who could stand in front of it, it provided much appreciated warmth. We were very grateful that we had arrived in camp before the snow started building up. We spent the rest of the evening in the pavilion. We made dinner and were eating by 4:00 PM as it started to get dark. Dinner consisted of dehydrated Beef Stroganoff, 2 packs of hot dogs which had been frozen and thawed as we hiked in to camp, tortillas, and Gatorade. Every bit of food was consumed by the group. It was noticed that the meal did not include a dessert, but that didn't seem to bother anyone. Everyone shared clementines, candy, sunflower seeds, and other snacks.

We cleaned up and many of the scouts were up in the east loft. There was a tolerable amount of horseplay that involved sleeping bag battles of some kind. There was a group of scouts and adults playing cards by the campfire. There was a square picnic table along the edge of the fireplace, so that one bench was warm to sit at. As we played cards, we decided that the two who would get that bench were (1) the dealer, and (2) the winner of that round of the game. Dealers were rotated, and the winner (usually Brendan) got to warm up for a few minutes until the next winner. We had lots of fun with the "high stakes" of warmth!

Because of the early sunset and early dinner, it was only 7:30 PM but it felt much later. The leaders discussed how well the scouts were doing, and that they had met all of their goals for the trip. Each and every scout on the trip had done a great job with teamwork, successful backpacking and keeping spirits up in a cold campsite. We decided that a reward for outstanding performance (and more warmth) would be a good thing, so we decided to do a Pizza run. With 12 scouts and 4 adults, 4 pies would do the trick. Mr. D and I made the journey to Franklin Lakes Pizza, with a run to Stop & Shop for more hot chocolate.

The pizza was a big hit. Each scout got to fill their stomach one last time for the evening. After a little bit longer of playing card games, it was about 9:30, and there was very little effort needed to convince everyone that it was bed time. During the night, Mr R. and Matt got up at different times during the night to keep the fire alive. While it wasn't providing direct heat to any of us, I think keeping it going was more symbolic of the determination and energy of the group.

By 7AM, the early risers were up and got the stoves running. We decided that formal reveille would be at 7:30. All were up and packing, or getting some of the quick oatmeal breakfast we had set up. We cleaned up the pavilion, extinguished the fireplace, and packed out. We were able to fit all the campers in the three cars, and departed for home.

Submitted by

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