

Troop 49 – The Pathfinders

Whitewater Rafting

May 2010

Alarm clocks rang early on Saturday, May 22, as the troop rallied to meet at 6AM for the departure of our Scout Rally whitewater rafting adventure. All were present and accounted for and we began the 100 mile drive to White Haven, PA. The skies were a bit cloudier than we had hoped for, but this didn't dampen the troop spirit as we arrived at the Whitewater Challenger Rafting Center before 8AM. The staff guided us to our campsite, and with 1 hour to spare for our check in time, we had plenty of time to set up camp. We re-grouped at 9AM, and checked in. Many scouts opted to rent wet suits and jackets for the day, since the forecast was not calling for much sun. We got our lifejackets, and boarded the bus for the 10 minute ride to the river.

While driving to the river, the guides on each bus introduced themselves. They reviewed many of the safety points and techniques that had been covered at our troop meeting on 5/13. The guides let us know that since this was not a dam release weekend, the water level would be a bit lower, and they advised us to have no more than 5 per raft. This change was addressed at the river side, and we quickly ironed out who would be rafting together.

The river was great. With the water level on the lower side, this creates a much more technical day, because the water does not just flow over everything. Throughout the morning, all of the rafts worked and adjusted their techniques and abilities to find the team balance. Some rafts brought extra equipment for the sake of having water wars. These rafts quickly found friends and foes alike, and engaged in all sorts of water combat. Some had super soakers that could send a stream of water a great distance. Others relied on the bailing buckets to throw walls of water at the other rafts. The water was cold, so there were not a lot of premeditated swims. There were a few scouts who did end up in the water after being ejected from the raft. All were safely returned to their rafts, and fun was had by all.

It's always heartwarming for a scoutmaster to hear when the troop has done well. Shortly before lunch, one of the veteran guides approached me and asked if a certain raft was a part of our group. The raft was a group of our high school aged scouts. The guide pointed out that these scouts were all very impressive, and in her words "gentlemen" because they were doing everything she had asked them to do all morning. Hearing things like that about the scouts never gets old! Great Job to that raft! One of the more technical spots we went through was called "The Chute". This is named because of the chute-like channel that you have to maneuver your raft through. It was very challenging.

At the two-thirds point, we stopped for lunch. Everyone found different spots to enjoy their lunches, stretch their legs, and talk over the rest of the trip with the guides. As we departed from lunch, the raft I was in found our stride. We were synchronized and hitting our marks on the river very well. At one set of rapids, we passed four other rafts that were hung up along the way. Our confidence had

peaked, and the other dad in the raft kept saying that he wanted to his some rapids going backwards, because he was confident that we could do it.

Further along, we got to a set of rapids called "One Way" - another technical location, offering only one way through. As we approached, two of the guides were out of their kayaks and were standing on the rocks in a preventative action to help keep rafts moving through the pass. As our raft approached, we bounced off a rock and the raft pivoted 180 degrees. We were going "One Way" backwards. Other than being backwards, we hit the channel perfectly, and swept down the falls going backwards. We were laughing and hollering the entire way. Our celebration was brief as the rapids were not entirely done yet, and we needed to keep focus on our paddling. By now, we were angling toward all the whitecaps, and making sure that each scout in the boat took on a good splash or two. We had the perfect balance of fun and adventure. This was an experience the scouts will not soon forget.

We reached the end point of our trip, and headed up the stairs to the waiting busses. Since we were the first group out in the morning, we returned to an empty campground by around 3:30PM. We were the first ones to the shower house, and since our campsite was already set up, we had some free time before dinner, which wouldn't start until after 4PM. The campground has installed a zip line, which runs along the top end of the parking lot. Our campsite was located just beyond the zip line, so it provided much entertainment as we watched other groups in camp as they participated in it. Many of our scouts decided to give it a try, purchased tickets, and ran the zip line. It's a great confidence builder. We witnessed one Girl Scout leader who was terrified, but did it, and all who were there cheered her on. Other pre-dinner activities included gathering firewood for a campfire.

Dinner was at 4PM, and we enjoyed the outfitter provided buffet of barbecued chicken, sloppy joes, hot dogs, rice, vegetables and baked potatoes with watermelon for dessert. Everyone ate well, and was very happy that we did not have to clean up. With dinner ending so early, this gave scouts free time to relax, and enjoy the camp. Some more went zip-lining and others worked on advancement. In the evening, the outfitter provided some additional programs. One was the visit from a wildlife rescue conservancy group. They brought a number of rescued animals including a corn snake, a bull snake, a lizard, and the one that seemed to endear everyone was a screech owl, who had lost an eye. We learned about how owls have such range of motion in their necks, because their eyeballs don't move independent of their heads. When the conservancy group left, there was another group there representing a colonial village that is located near to the outfitter. They brought artifacts, and colonial handmade toys that the scouts played with. Meanwhile, there was a sports field area, where other scouts went and were playing soccer with other campers. At 8PM, they put a movie on in the dining hall area, and many of our scouts got to see Avatar. Several dads were also in the dining hall playing cards, etc.

We returned to the campsite, and scouts were interested in starting a fire. Our younger scouts worked on building the fire, and used about a half inch of a utility candle as a fire starter, then built a log cabin around it along the side of a larger log. Once that got started, added larger wood in a lean-to style over the fire until it got going. Everyone gathered their chairs around the campfire, and we had a fun time telling stories from the river. The campground has a strict 11PM no noise policy, and we met with

Gary, the night time security guard, who was making his rounds on the golf cart. He didn't need to return, since most scouts were in bed earlier than 11PM after the long day.

On Sunday morning, we awoke, and broke camp rather quickly. The troop provided a "grab and go" breakfast of apples, granola bars, juice bottle, and the most popular item, Entenmann's Mini Bite muffins. There was also hot water and coffee. By 8:45 AM, all were packed up, and we did one last sweep of the campsite for trash. The last vehicle rolled out by 9AM.

Submitted by Rob Dente, Scoutmaster-In-Charge