

Troop 49, The Pathfinders
Sandy Hook Trip Report
September 11 – 12, 2010

Saturday, September 11, 2010

Saturday opened with beautiful clear blue skies, a crisp fresh breeze and temperatures in the 60s - a perfect day for our journey to Sandy Hook. Our group of thirty four scouts, siblings, and parents mustered in the OLPH parking lot at 7:30, and after brief roll call and a few remarks from Mr. Folkerts concerning bicycle safety and parking logistics, the convoy departed for Sandy Hook at 7:45. Mr. Salvesen and family had the trailer in tow - thank you - and scouts, siblings and parents were on our way!

Traffic was very light, and the trip to the campsite was pleasant - about 90 minutes. Check in was brief and uneventful, and we proceeded to Campsite 3 off parking lot H. We found the smallish parking lot full, and so proceeded to unload our gear prior to moving cars to lot L. As we were located in site 3 and park regulations do not permit locating the trailer at the site, the group began the process of hauling troop gear to the site. As we unloaded, we were welcomed to "The Hook" by a pair of National Park Rangers who reaffirmed our prior notification that open fires were strictly prohibited due to the lack of rain in the previous few weeks and because of the steady breeze we were enjoying. Fortunately for us, we were permitted to use gas stoves for cooking meals. As we unpacked, a couple of spots opened up in Lot H, which meant we were able to keep the trailer closer at hand. By 10:30, most scouts and families were settled in and the troop gear "nesting" concluded about 11:00.

Given the time and the energy expended moving gear, consensus was quickly gained on an early lunch. Mr. Zakrzewski opened lunch by reading a poignant post a friend of his had written expressing a desire for peace and unity on the 9th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist tragedies. His friend, as we learned, had been an eye witness to the tragedy in New York City, and had befriended some German tourists and had actually taken them into his home for several days as they waited for flights to resume. The message was quite moving and stirred palpable emotions in the adults present who will not soon forget the events of that day.

Next up, cycle tour! It was quite a spectacle to watch the 30 or so bikes roll North from the parking lot toward the Coast Guard station. The multi-use trail affords lovely views of Horseshoe Cove and Sandy Hook Bay, and this day relieved us with a cooling breeze off the water. The ride to the Coast Guard station was a brief 15 minutes. Along the way, and in keeping with troop tradition, all of the scouts dismounted and scaled enormous Rodman Gun mounted in front of Fort Hancock for a group photo. We then made our way again North to the gates of the Coast Guard station.

Thanks to the efforts of Mr. Kozak, we were to be the recipients of a wonderful tour of the Coast Guard station. We were welcomed by Guardsman Felix Moreau, who would be leading our tour of the facility along with Guardsman Diaz. We began our session in a classroom used by the Guard for training and meetings, and were well schooled on the role of the Coast Guard in federal law enforcement, homeland security, and rescue missions, as well as other responsibilities. We were also shown the equipment they rely upon to execute their missions. Of course, the scouts and their siblings were captivated when the display of weapons escalated from hand gun to rifle to shot gun to a large machine gun that could fire with accuracy at a target up to three miles away! Continuing on the September 11 theme of the day, we were also given an explanation of the Guard's role in the events of that day in 2001.

Following the 30 minute classroom session, we moved on to the wharf where the vessels were tied up. We were oriented to, and allowed to board and tour, two separate ships: the 25-foot Defender Class Boat and the much larger 47-foot Motor Lifeboat, the later distinguished by its ability to self right in the event of capsiz. Our tour concluded back in the station cafeteria where we were able to view a graphical history of the Coast Guard painted on the walls above the windows by a volunteer. Not only was the work lovely and well worth the time to read, because the Guardsmen are tested on the history of the Coast Guard, it also provided a practical function as well: like reading Cliff notes during an afternoon meal.

At about 2:45 PM, we took our leave of the station and continued our tour to the East, passing the Nine Gun Battery on North Beach on the way to Battery Potter just a few minutes away by bicycle. Completed in 1885, Battery Pottery is an absolutely massive reinforced concrete structure used to mount two 12 inch breech-loaded rifled guns. It is the only battery that was ever constructed to use steam power to raise and lower the guns for reloading purposes. These guns could fire a 1,000 pound projectile seven miles! That's roughly the distance from Oakland to Ridgewood. A Smart Car, for comparison, weighs only about 1,800 lbs. However, since targeting was a tricky business, and given that it took six minutes to reload after firing, it was questionably effective against moving targets like ships, the facility was eventually abandoned in favor of more modern equipment and facilities.

From Battery Potter, it was on to the mortar battery, and then a quick tour of the visitor's center at the Sandy Hook Lighthouse. Due to the size of our group, we were not allowed to ascend the lighthouse. Instead, a number of the scouts toured the visitor's center which contained some excellent interpretive displays covering the important historical features of the area, and, of course, patches of the lighthouse, which a few scouts procured for their ever increasing collection.

By now it was nearing 4:00 and the group once again strung out to complete the three-ish mile ride back to our campsite. We were once again treated to beautiful views and cooling breezes as we rode home, hungry, thirsty, and ready for a break.

Three scouts volunteered to prepare the meals for the scouts in order to satisfy their requirement for First Class rank advancement. Upon our return, some scouts enjoyed a snack and played cards while dinner was being prepared. Others took the opportunity to explore on foot or on bicycle, while others rode further South on the bike path toward the Nike missile launchers or the bridge.

At 5:30 the hungry scouts were served hamburgers, hotdogs and salad. Following the scout dinner, the Bukovec family prepared an excellent meal of grilled chicken and steak served on flour tortillas, with fresh onions, tomato and gyro sauce for the adults and siblings. It was excellent!

Post dinner, the scouts engaged in a serious game of Manhunt made particularly intriguing by the many paths through the low, thick underbrush that defines the area in and around Sandy Hook. Others settled in at the table for a game of Uno that would last well into the evening. A few scouts even took the opportunity to participate in Scout Master conferences and Boards of Review as well.

As evening transitioned to night and darkness found its grip on the campground, a brilliant column of blue light could be seen shining up through the clouds from the site of the World Trade Center towers in lower Manhattan. Somehow summoning unused energy from the day's cycling, Mrs. Cameron, Mr. Rosfjord, and Mr. Folkerts set out on a reconnaissance mission to locate a viewpoint from which all could view the Manhattan skyline and the brilliant spotlight. With a location well scouted, Mrs. Cameron led a return caravan with about

15 scouts, siblings, and parents for a beautiful viewing of the NYC coastline, from Coney Island all the way down to the Verrazano Narrows bridge. The bluish spotlight projecting up from the World Trade Center site was magnificent. This was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. Thanks again to Mr. Folkerts Mr. Rosfjord, and Mrs. Cameron for making a truly inspired evening happen. Upon our return, lights out was quick in coming for everyone, and the campground went still sometime after 10:00 PM.

Sunday, September 12, 2010

Sunday broke early with the throaty rumble of large jet engines. Jumbo jets returning from international flights were rumbling in on final approach to JFK airport, only 16 miles to the Northeast. Sunday was to be a cool, gray day, in sharp contrast to the day before. Nonetheless, the forecasted rain was still hours off and there was much fun to be had. The scouts and their families eventually all arose and made their way to the picnic tables where juice, milk, fruit, cereal, muffins, and bagels awaited them.

As there was no formal agenda for the day, some families packed early in an effort to beat the coming road closing for the triathlon being hosted on the Sandy Hook peninsula. Soccer games and other family events awaited back in Oakland. Others took a more leisurely approach and enjoyed the cool of the morning, using the opportunity to get a morning cycle in before the ride home. Those that remained began the process of breaking camp and lugging the troop gear back to the trailer.

Provisions had been made for Sunday lunch for those who would not be departing before 11:00 when the road reopened. Many elaborate and delectable sandwiches were created with turkey, ham, roast beef, cheese and other goodies spread on the table. Thanks again to the three volunteer scouts and the Bukovec family for the terrific spread! Surely no one returned home from this outing hungry.

The last few items were stowed and bikes loaded under a soft rain that finally came to Sandy Hook, and at 11:00, we circled up the last few cars, bade farewell to Sandy Hook, and headed for home. A special thank you to Mr. Folkerts for all of the advanced planning necessary to execute a terrific trip.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Burns, Assistant Scoutmaster

Notes for future visitors to Sandy Hook:

1. Firewood is unwelcome by the National Park Service because of a concern for the importation of unwanted pests. They provide firewood at the campsites and there would have been plenty for our use if conditions had been suitable. It was, however, in large log form. A splitting maul would have been very handy.
2. There is ample potable water at the site. No need to cart water from home.
3. As the campsites are some distance from the parking area, it would be helpful to have along a large and sturdy cart or wagon to move heavy, bulky things like stoves and patrol boxes.
4. There is poison ivy EVERYWHERE. We were fortunate to avoid incident, but exercise caution and be sure to educate everyone in advance.
5. Raccoons are about the only real concern in the varmint department. Though it's tiresome, plan to store food in the trailer overnight and while everyone is out of camp.