

**Troop 49, The Pathfinders**  
**Camp Glen Gray/Pioneering Merit Badge Trip Report**  
**December 11 – 12, 2010**

**Saturday, December 11, 2010**

After a week of unseasonably frigid temperatures and forecasts calling for a rainy weekend, our weather prayers were answered as Saturday opened with beautiful clear blue skies, a crisp fresh breeze and temperatures in the 40s - a perfect day for our sojourn into the world of pioneering at Camp Glen Gray in Mahwah. Our group of Scouts and parents mustered in the OLPH parking lot at 8:00, and, after a brief roll call and a few remarks from Mr. Richards concerning sleeping arrangements and general safety issues, the convoy departed for Camp Glen Gray at 8:10. Mr. Fern had the trailer in tow (thank you!), providing great relief to Mr. Burns' overloaded Van. He had a van full of firewood that he scavenged along Route 202, four twelve foot poles, seemingly miles of rope, additional poles for use in building the anticipated monkey bridge, gear, tools and a kitchen sink or two – and somehow made it up the side of the mountain and safely into the camp.

The trip took about ten minutes and check in was brief and uneventful. After the Scouts helped shift gear from the various vehicles and troop trailer onto a pick-up truck supplied by the camp, we proceeded to hike up to the Gilwell cabin and lean-to area located toward the back of the campsite. By shortly after 9:00 a.m. all the Scouts and parents were at the Gilwell site, with the gear off-loaded from the camp's truck and awaiting proper stowage. First order of business was to determine which Scouts were sleeping in the cabin and which ones were ready to brave the wintry weather and sleep outside in lean-tos. That process was surprisingly smooth, with nine scouts electing to sleep indoors and eight ready to test their mettle against the December elements. Scouts and parents rapidly went about stowing their gear, setting up tents and generally getting squared away. By 10:00 all were ready to begin our pioneering adventure.

The day's activities began with Mr. Burns leading a discussion on the various engineering and safety protocols involved in building a monkey bridge. The Scouts actively participated in the discussion, identifying potential points of failure, calculating the size of the overall bridge and the corresponding amount of rope necessary to create a structure of that size. Following the planning stage, the Scouts were broken up into four groups and charged with completing specific aspects of the bridge: "Trestle A" group was responsible for building trestle A; "Trestle B" group was responsible for erecting, um..., trestle B; the "Anchor gang" was responsible for creating anchoring positions sufficient to hold the bridge in place; with the "Rope gang" being responsible for preparing the actual rope bridge and safety handrails by way of many, many clove hitches. To our short lived dismay, the frigid temperatures from the prior week left the ground completely frozen, thwarting our efforts to impale the surface with proper anchoring stakes. Not to be deterred, the Scouts quickly assessed the situation, adapted their plans and overcame the hurdle thrown at them by Mother Nature. Following a quick scan of the area, a stout telephone pole and tree, approximately fifty feet apart from each other, were recruited to act as standing anchors for our bridge. Thereafter, the anchoring team was disbanded and integrated into the remaining three groups and the project started in earnest.

Mr. Burns and Mr. Richards acted as supervisors, providing guidance to the various Scout groups as needed. Older Scouts were placed in charge of the two "Trestle groups" and expertly guided, demonstrated and supported the younger Scouts until, in what seemed to be a remarkably short period of time, two twelve foot "X-trestles" were completed and maneuvered into position. In the meantime, after a short refresher on the proper technique for tying a clove hitch, the Rope gang laid out the main and handrail ropes, marked off where

the guy lines were to be affixed and began tying, and tying, and tying. After double and triple checking the knots to ensure they were safely and accurately done, the Scouts placed the ropes over the supine trestles. Some Scouts then raised the trestles, while others helped guide the ropes into their proper position and secured the bridge in place with the assistance of the aforementioned telephone pole and tree. This is when the fun began. While one scout was atop the left trestle, attempting to tighten one of the hand rails, the trestle appeared to shift. Once the Scout's heart rate calmed, he continued to tighten the rail, only to have the entire trestle shift again. Close inspection revealed that the base of one of the support poles was crumbling, threatening to collapse the entire enterprise. Not to be deterred, the Scouts (amidst a flurry of activity that, upon slow motion replay, revealed itself to be Mr. Burns) once again adapted and overcame, with the assistance of our erstwhile Scout Master, Paul Zakrzewski, by lashing a support pole to the crumbling base of the trestle. Further inspection revealed that the top of that same pole was also questionable in terms of its structural integrity, which was duly addressed through yet by another frenzy of lashings before, during, and after lunch.

Following a short repast of cold cuts, rolls, fruit and chips, the Scouts were re-energized and ready to test the product of their efforts. The bridge was reinspected, the anchoring lines tightened and the first volunteer Scout was ready to step onto the Troops' creation. Success! Scouts lined up and, one by one, cautiously made their way across the thirty-five foot long and slightly over eight foot high monkey bridge. Spotters followed the Scouts along their perilous journey, with Mr. Dente helpfully, and repeatedly, advising crossers to "squat down and push the hand rails out to the sides—not down! – to steady the rope bridge." Finally, after all the Scouts had crossed the bridge, Mr. Dente followed suit, with the Scouts helpfully (and with a little amusement) reiterating the oft heard yet sound advice to "squat down and push the hand rails out to the sides—not down! – to steady the rope bridge." The remaining parents eventually gave in to their primal need to conquer the bridge and soon all made their way across, experiencing first hand the thrill of walking along a rope stretched between two trestles over eight feet in the air. Thankfully, no one fell off the bridge, and only one Scout lost his balance, but maintained his perch by quickly landing on the actual rope – one leg to each side. While perhaps a bit "uncomfortable", that Scout gritted his way through his ordeal, flashed a smile for the camera, regained his feet and conquered the remaining fifteen feet to arrive safely on the other side. Emboldened by the fact that the bridge was able not only to withstand the Scouts scampering across its narrow beam, but also the significantly more ample mass of the parents, Scouts began streaming across the bridge like, well, monkeys. The final piece de resistance was a picture of ten Scouts ranged across the span of the bridge with the Troop flag fluttering resolutely from the center.

It was time to move on. The scouts gathered and reluctantly agreed that we needed to take down the bridge – with that reluctance quickly being replaced by avid enthusiasm after being told that they could burn it later that night. Thereafter, Scouts proceeded to complete additional requirements for the Pioneering merit badge by coiling and throwing rope, demonstrating how to lift a heavy weight by using an improvised block and tackle apparatus, making rope by using a home made rope making machine (thanks goes out to Mr. Burns), demonstrating splicing techniques and knots. As night settled in and dinner prepared and eaten, some of the Scouts broke down the bridge poles and prepared a huge fire. After a few starts and stops, Mr. Richards was finally able to properly ignite the blaze, providing a mesmerizing display of dancing embers and fluttering ash. Scout and parents gathered round the fire, sang some songs and generally basked in the knowledge that they had each contributed to yet another successful day of camping for the Pathfinders of Troop 49.

## **Sunday, December 12, 2010**

Sunday was a cool, rain soaked day, in sharp contrast to the day before. The Scouts and parents arose and ate a quick breakfast of muffins, bagels, juice and fruit and then began to break down tents, stow gear and generally prepare to get back home and out of the cold and rainy conditions. Mr. Richards and Mr. Burns made the trek down to the camp headquarters and arranged for the camp truck to move the gear from the campsite back to the parking lot. Scouts and parents then bade fond farewells to Camp Glen Gray and each other and hurriedly left the area eager to be out of the cold, wet weather and into the warmth of their homes, visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads (or at least a nice hot shower).

A very special and heartfelt thank you to Mr. Paul Burns for his planning, scavenging, effort and sheer force of will that helped propel the entire Troop in its first and ultimately wildly successful attempt to build a thirty-foot long monkey bridge in under four hours. Huzza!

Respectfully submitted,

Tendai Richards, Assistant Scoutmaster

### Notes for future visitors to Camp Glen Gray:

1. Because the Troop trailer is quite far from the campsite, it is imperative that you make a list of items needed at the actual campsite to avoid the many, many trips that were made back and forth on this outing.
2. There is ample potable water at the site – especially during the warmer months. No need to cart water from home.
3. Bring a bucket.





