



Troop 49, The Pathfinders

Virginia Spring Break Trip Report

April 13-17, 2011

Wednesday, April 13, 2011

At last, our epic Virginia adventure gets underway! Under foreboding skies, 16 scouts, 2 siblings and 12 adults mustered at OLPH for our customary 7 AM briefing. After roll call and a few brief words, the group departed OLPH at 7:10 for the 5 hour trip to Mt. Vernon, Virginia.

The group arrived at 12:10 and gathered in the parking lot across from the entrance. The rain we had travel in from New Jersey was left behind somewhere near the Maryland border, and things began to look up. Lunch was an informal stand-up affair in the parking area as the afternoon was organized and tickets were secured. Our tour of the mansion was scheduled for 1:20, so we had some time to take in a bit of the grounds on our own. It was mid April and spring was underway in Virginia, so we took the opportunity to tour the formal flower garden and a few of the adjacent buildings.

At 1:20, we began our tour of the estate. The scouts - and parents, for that matter- were struck by the idea that many of the nation's early influential leaders tread these very stairs and rooms. It was really a thrill!

Following the mansion tour, we explored the expansive grounds following the excellent Mount Vernon Historic Trail guide. It gave the tour some structure and ensured we didn't miss any of the fascinating things to see. The printed guide also posed some questions encouraging the scouts to think and getting them engaged in the day. It was also impressive how many scouts participated in the question and answer sessions. Several of the scouts also took advantage of an opportunity to practice their public speaking as they read the interpretive explanation for the various buildings we visited. The round barn used to thresh wheat was particularly interesting to the scouts and adults. Its architecture was typical of Washington - simple, elegant, efficient, and practical. By just after 4 PM, the Scouts had completed all of the stops in the guide, and thereby earned the Mt. Vernon Trail Patch!

At 4:20, we gathered around the flag pole near the entrance to the compound for the flag lowering ceremony. Troop 49 had the honor of lowering the flag this day. The Senior Patrol Leader read a prayer and, assisted by the SPL and ASPL, four of our new scouts lowered, folded, and presented the flag to an official from Mt. Vernon. In exchange, Troop 49 was presented with a certificate acknowledging our participation in the ceremony.

Next task: grab our pre-ordered box dinners and depart for Tappahannock, VA! The kitchen at Mt. Vernon did an excellent job, and the sandwiches were gone long before we escaped from the nasty Washington DC traffic! As we cleared Fredericksburg, the traffic thinned and we made better time through the beautiful tidewater countryside.



We arrived at the Troop 304 scout house about 7:20 delighted to be off the road and settling in. Scoutmaster John Magruder, ever the gracious host, arrived to familiarize us with the accommodations and make us feel absolutely as welcome as home.

The scout house had everything we could wish for: abundant space for dining at tables, a kitchen, a bathroom with a *hot* shower, and a sheltered space for sleeping in the event of inclement weather. It was a terrific home away from home. Even better, it is situated on the banks of beautiful Hoskins Creek. In most places, Hoskins Creek would be called a river - but in this case, it is a tributary of the Rappahannock, a river approximately the size of the lower Hudson! The scout house was well equipped with a robust selection of canoes and kayaks. There would be some exceptional paddling to come on Hoskins Creek.

About 8:30, Mr. Burns and Mr. Zakrzewski made a run to 304 ASM Coleman's home to pick up life vests. We received the same southern hospitality from Mr. Coleman - anything we needed would be made available. This hospitality would sustain throughout our entire visit.

Lights out about 11:00.

Thursday, April 14, 2011

As would be the tradition for the next 3 days, a few boaters were to be found on the water before sunrise. Thursday broke crisp and fresh with mist rising off Hoskins Creek. The sunrise, which our boaters shared with several inquisitive beavers and box turtles, was simply magnificent.





For most though, Thursday began with a breakfast of scrambled eggs, French toast, roasted potatoes and bacon. The sound and smell of sizzling bacon was enough to wake the soundest of sleepers. The scouts devoured breakfast as only hungry scouts will, and by 9:00, we were cleaned up and on our way to Historic Jamestown. It was a gorgeous day - in the high 60s - without a cloud in the sky.

Our Jamestown experience began with the 11:00 tour of the excavation of the original Jamestown Fort. Our guide, who has been a part of the excavation team for some 17 years, first as an intern, then a grad student, and now a senior member of the archaeology team, was utterly captivating. He did a magnificent job of explaining the transatlantic detective work required to correlate the Virginia Company source documents with the excavated findings in order to authenticate the materials found - for an hour or so, we experienced our own personal episode of "Jamestown CSI". Scouts and adults hung on every word.

As two bald eagles soared overhead, Troop 49 feasted on a lunch buffet set up under some shade trees in the parking lot. (Thanks Mr. Z for the table - a new Troop 49 best practice!). With hunger sated, the group split up. This would be the only day designed with the opportunity for flexibility in the schedule - some would continue to tour Jamestown, others would continue on to Yorktown and a few went back to the scout house for some quality father-son time fishing and paddling on Hoskins Creek.

The group that toured the Glass House exhibit on Jamestown Island found it to be a terrific opportunity to see period glass blowers in action. We'll be sure to include that next time.

Yorktown was engaging, with interpretive displays of the civil war battle that, for all intents and purposes, ended the civil war. The museum itself will soon be modernized to include multimedia exhibits. That more rich experience built into modern museums was conspicuously absent. However, the ultimate in multimedia - live human beings - were on display in the outdoor civil war encampment. Scouts were treated to conversations with "real" soldiers making camp. The similarities to our own camping experiences were many, and the scouts related well to the soldiers and their situation. Perhaps the most engaging point in the afternoon was the demonstration of musket skills and the rapid fire sequence one of the soldiers put on for our benefit.

About 4:30, we headed across the famous and now well understood York river toward home.

When we arrived at camp, we were delighted to be joined by the Cameron family, as they folded their vacation into the troop trip. A dinner of spaghetti and meatballs, salad and rolls was well enjoyed by all. Thanks to the Richards and Burns families for the day's meals and to Mr. Fern for his expert assistance. All was quiet in camp by 10:30. Even Mr. Richards, our usual midnight fire tender, was in early.



Friday, April 15, 2011

Friday began for some at first light with an early morning paddle. As was our ritual, breakfast was eggs and French toast, potatoes and sausage instead of bacon. Today was to be a very full day - and all of the scouts were up, fed and gone by 8:20. Pretty good for a crew of about 35.

Mr. Fern and Mr. Zakrzewski had arranged a tour of the water treatment plant adjacent to the scout house property. It was a cool opportunity for the scouts to see a facility like this in full production. With another glorious day in store, we were off to a terrific start.

Next up, the drive to Williamsburg and lunch. For efficiency of movement around Williamsburg, we agreed to eat a little early, and found a beautiful shady spot adjacent to the parking garage on North Henry Street. Mr. Z's table was once again put to work and in 20 minutes, we had the whole crew fed and happy. Thanks Dugas, Mellone, and Fern families!

Our formal tour of Williamsburg was to begin at 1:40, so we had some time to wander on our own and take in the amazing sights, sounds and smells of the town. Groups had a chance to see the blacksmith's shop, the cobbler, the gunsmith, the armory, and Bruton Parish church, amongst others. We met our guides at 1:40 and split the group in two - a necessity given how small some of the artisan's shops are. The scouts then had an opportunity to "load and fire a cannon" on the palace green, raise water from a working well, visit the silversmith, the cooper, and of course, the gaol (jail). Don't get tired yet - we're just getting started!

After a very competitive game of trap-ball, we moved on to the courthouse where we conducted a mock trial - of course our SPL was the presiding judge. We also moved through the other chambers, listening to our guides explain all of the inequities experienced by the colonial citizens. Small wonder there was a revolt.

It was now time to head back toward the cars, pick up a few souvenirs, and get a troop photo. Can you believe it? General Lafayette and his aide had heard we were in Williamsburg for the day and insisted we include them in our troop photo!



After an hour and half in the car, no one felt like cooking dinner. Fortunately for us, we didn't have to. By the time we returned home, our host, Troop 304, had been long at it, preparing dinner for us! Over a dozen 304 scouts, and a similar number of parents turned out for a lovely evening. While we waited for the older scouts to prepare dinner, the younger scouts were able to renew acquaintances from Camp Turrell, and the adults were engaged in scouting conversations as well.

As we gathered for dinner, 304 Scoutmaster Magruder formally welcomed Troop 49 to Virginia. His welcome was followed by Philmont Grace, and we began eating - by rank, of course! There was an abundance of hamburgers, hot dogs, various salads and soft drinks for all, made so much nicer by the camaraderie that goes with scouting. Following dinner, on behalf of Troop 49, Mr. Zakrzewski presented Scoutmaster Magruder and ASM Coleman with a framed photo from Camp Turrell inset with the five US postage stamps that have featured Scouting. As is scouting tradition, a series of skits followed around a massive roaring fire. Thanks to the scouts from both troops who participated in the fun. Stories followed the campfire, and by 11:30 or so, all was once again quiet in the scout house. It was truly a memorable day in Virginia, due in large part to the kindness and sense of brotherhood demonstrated by Troop 304.

Saturday, April 16, 2011

Some new faces were to be found on the water this early morning, as some quality mom-son time was squeezed in before the day began, and some serious looking clouds began to form. Once again we began with a hearty breakfast of eggs, French toast, bacon, cereal and juice. We



were fed and gone by 8:15, for we had a long drive to Hampton Roads harbor. Thanks to Mr. Fern and Mr. Dishian (and son!) for breakfast.

We reached NAUTICUS, the fine maritime museum in Norfolk around 10:00 and had a few minutes to visit the museum and get our bearings for the afternoon before boarding the 95' Victory Rover ship for a narrated tour of Hampton Roads Harbor and Norfolk Naval Station. We cruised past dry docks where a number of naval vessels were under renovation, then out into the larger harbor where we got as close as one could want to a cross sampling of the Navy's Atlantic Fleet. Arrayed before use were destroyers, cruisers, submarines and other ships too numerous to count. It was a humbling site and the scouts seemed very impressed by it all.

Also impressive was the wind that had begun to blow - a major storm was marching east, and we were getting the first samples. The captain reported 25 knot winds coming over the bow as we completed our run past the spectacle, and turned back toward port. Troop 49 reported below and into the bow of the enclosed portion of the ship for yet another wonderful lunch buffet - thanks Mr. Mellone and Mr. Dishian! The captain quipped that he had never had a buffet served aboard his ship, and was very impressed. So were several of his crewmen as they enjoyed sandwiches, chips and drinks courtesy of Troop 49.

At 1:00, we thanked our crew, made our way ashore, and began the afternoon touring NAUTICUS. The scouts had free reign of the museum, and enjoyed many different exhibits including water flow study simulations, remote submersible vehicles, battleship design simulations and numerous other excellent learning centers. There was even a rope exhibit that at least two assistant scoutmasters found very compelling! Did I mention the battleship? There was one of those too!

At 3:30, we headed for our cars and the two hour ride back to the scout house, satisfied that we had squeezed as much as humanly possible into our visit. By now, the adventurous wind the scouts played in on the bow of the Rover was a full blown storm, having, unbeknownst to us, left many homes and lives in North Carolina devastated. At the scout house, the scouts and adults spread out and prepared for an evening indoors. With the blessing of the scoutmasters, the boys began to re-assimilate to the outside world. Electronics appeared from every pack pocket and soon the scout house was a WiFi Nintendo Facebook cell phone hotbed.

As the card games were in full swing, the smell of Mr. Dishian's homemade soup lifted spirits and stimulated salivary glands all at once. As if in concert with the wonderful smell in the cabin, the sun broke through the clouds and a double rainbow appeared just outside the scout house. Ironically, the end of the rainbow was centered on the water treatment plant next door. So much for the pot of gold theory! Of course, the soup lived up to its billing, and was quickly dispatched. The second course, using up just about everything we had left over from the week, was a gourmet rendition of sausage and peppers. Excellent.



Courtesy of one of the moms from Troop 304, we had cake for desert. We dressed it up with a candle or two and wished Mr. Fern a rousing happy birthday. Thanks 304, the cake was terrific.

By 8:30, the storm had blown off to the Northeast, the moon was full, and one more paddle was in order. Accompanied by 6 intrepid scouts, the SIC headed one last time for Hoskins Creek and a truly memorable paddle under the full moon. After settling into their kayaks and grouping up just off shore, we doused headlamps one by one and made our way up the river by moonlight. The scouts were thrilled! We managed an adventure that will, I am sure, stick with the scouts for years to come.

About 10:00, the Troop collapsed the dining tables and turned the scout house into a dorm room. All was quiet, but for the snoring, by 11:00.

Sunday, April 16, 2011

The crew was up early, cleaned, and gone by 7:50. We made a quick stop at Shoney's for breakfast, then began the long slog home.

Parting Thoughts

Our most sincere thanks go to the leaders, scouts, and parents of Troop 304. They provided the inspiration for our trip, the facility to make it possible, and a touching reminder that the Brotherhood of Scouting is truly alive and well.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Burns

ASM



Lessons Learned

- Virginia is a historically rich environment with many, many things to do and see. We barely scratched the surface.
 - We could have been more aware of storms. In the future, designate someone at home to watch over us via the web.
 - The trip was a compromise with the adult's time off from work, otherwise it could easily have been the full week with some local activities around the scout hose some days to ease up on the travel.
 - While we've proven we can cover 1,300 miles in 5 days, it's a bit much.
 - The folding table was a tremendous asset for serving lunch - it's a must for future trips where a buffet-style meal is the order of the day.
 - Poison ivy grew in abundance. We need to make sure that all scouts and parents can recognize it and that we have an appropriate amount of ointments/salves in the First Aid kit.
-