



**Troop 49, The Pathfinders
Round Valley Recreational Area
October 15 and 16, 2011**

Saturday, October 15, 2011

At 8:00 AM on Saturday morning, 26 scouts, 12 adults, 12 kayaks, 6 canoes, and 1 motor boat gathered for our "Scouts on the Water" adventure.



We completed roll call and discussed our two adversaries for the day: wind and impatience. Little did we know that we would soon face them both.

Our group dispersed at 8:15 and departed for the hour drive to Round Valley Recreation Area in Lebanon, New Jersey. 10 minutes down the road, the cell phone rang; it was the ranger at Round Valley. To be sure, she wasn't calling to remind us to bring sun block! It seems the wind at Round Valley was high. Too high. Winds exceeding 25 mph trigger sirens and strobes mounted on towers around the reservoir, and no one is allowed on the water. We wouldn't be paddling today.

The message traveled quickly from car to car as cell phones carried the grim, disappointing news. By the time we reached the parking lot along the water, nearly every scout and leader had gotten the word. Our adversary was now in our faces. Winds well in excess of 25 miles per hour were whipping the surface of Round Valley Reservoir into a froth. Disappointment would not rule the day for this crew. In true scout fashion, the process of adapting and overcoming began quickly. For those who had them, empty packs emerged and loads were reconfigured. Matt and Colin, who were without packs, improvised a stretcher. Truly inspiring!

At 10:30, after distributing troop gear and loads and pausing for a quick group photo, the procession began to string out along the trail under the watchful eye of Mr. Dugas, trail master for the hike.



We covered the 4 miles in about 2.5 hours, arriving at camp about 1:00. There were some issues along the way with gear and loads, but for the majority, the hike was uneventful. After selecting tent sites by rank, the scouts quickly devoured lunch and established camp.

For a few scouts, one goal remained for the day: completing a 5 mile hike; so they set off and made short work of the additional mile or so, bagging a couple of geocaches in the process. The remaining scouts set about various camp tasks: fire ring improvement, wood gathering, debris clean up and fishing. As the afternoon progressed, several of the senior scouts worked on advancement with their more junior brethren.

Great news! Just after 2:00 PM, the strobes stopped! Boating was now allowed on the reservoir. Or was it? What if we hiked 4 miles back to the cars only to have the strobes activate once again? Ugh. Could the wind pick up and trap the boats in camp? Patience. Wait and see.

Patience was short. At 2:20, two scoutmasters and four scouts headed back over the 4 miles for the boats. By 3:30, they were at the cars, and by 4:00, 4 canoes and 3 kayaks were being ferried across the lake. As darkness began to fall, one more trip seemed within the bounds of safety and available light. 3 adults crossed the lake to the boat ramp and returned with 8 kayaks in tow. Our situation was improving by the minute.

While the boat shuttling was taking place, two of our anglers met with success. Freddy landed a nice sized smallmouth bass, and Mr. Leymeister landed a beautiful 17" rainbow trout, which the scouts proceeded to clean and cook. Fishing was difficult; the wind was of course an issue, and being a reservoir, the slope of the shore was quite shallow, perhaps only 3 or 4 feet deep in casting range. Did I mention that we didn't have boats?

By 5:00, dinner was well under way. The scouts were making very short work of the freeze dried meals. The stroganoff was the clear favorite, followed by spaghetti and meat balls, macaroni and cheese, and Buffalo chicken. Using tortillas, the adults made wraps from Buffalo Chicken, Chili Mac, and a couple of the other packages. They all tasted terrific, as camp food nearly always does!

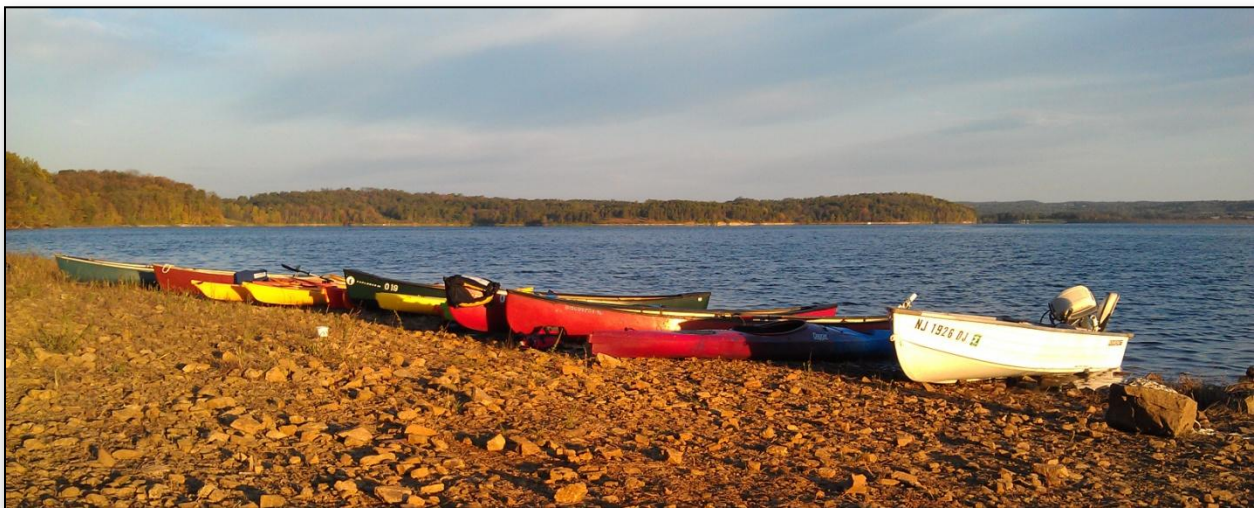
After dinner, as the sun set, the wind died and the reservoir went completely flat. For the next three and a half hours, every scout had an opportunity to paddle on the inky back water of the reservoir under a tremendous exhibition of stars and planets. The shore was aglow from the campfire and headlamps, as the boats slipped out

of the lights and into the darkness. Once one's eyes adjusted, it was quite comfortable without headlamps; in fact they ruined night vision and were a liability. After about 8 pm, the night was made even more spectacular by the nearly full moon rising over the mountain to the northeast, creating picture-perfect silhouettes of the kayakers and canoeists.

By 10 pm, all the boats were off the water. By 10:30, with the camp settled and bear bags hung, a very tired and satisfied group of scouts and leaders were in for the night.

Sunday, October 16, 2011

At 5:30 AM, the wind was blowing pretty hard, but without daylight, it was difficult to judge just how hard. Oh no. If the strobes are on, we're trapped here with the boats until the wind dies. How long would that take? An hour? A day? Ugh.



Not to worry. As the sun rose, the winds stayed below about 10 mph. We would be OK, though the journey back would be a tough paddle directly into the wind.

After a light breakfast of yogurt, pop tarts, and oatmeal, scouts broke down tents and thoroughly cleaned the camp. Hiking today would be a bit easier for those returning on the land route. Loads were broken up to be transported by boat where possible. Priority was given to kayakers gear that wouldn't fit below deck, troop gear, large multi-person gear such as a 4 man tent, and finally, individual gear. The canoes and the motor boat were used to carry equipment.

The hikers departed camp at 9:00, followed shortly thereafter by Fleet 49. The paddle was beautiful, with the warm sun on our backs, and tiring, with the wind in our faces. The hikers were able to enjoy the cool of the morning with enough breeze to make the woods pleasant. By 10:00, all of the boats were ashore being emptied, washed, and loaded back on the trailer. The hiking crew arrived at 10:30, nearly halving the time of our hike in the previous morning. Impressive considering many had now covered 9 miles on land and had spent much of the previous evening paddling.



In the end, this was a rewarding and enjoyable trip. Lots of valuable lessons were learned about packing, endurance, weather conditions, and meal preferences. I believe that nearly everyone would prepare a bit differently as a result of this experience, and after all, that is what separates wisdom from knowledge. For sure, we had lots of fun along the way as well.

Some big thanks are in order:

- Mr. Dugas for managing the hike,
- Mr. Richards for planning for the fishing merit badge work,
- Mr. Dishian for help constructing the boat trailer,
- Mr. Fern for his big help with the boats, and for the motor boat which saved the trip.

I would like to close with a sincere thank you to Rob Fisher of Ramsey Outdoor. Rob and his team helped to outfit us with kayaks, canoes, paddles, PFDs, and meals. They were accommodating, helpful, and just terrific to work with. If you have a need, they deserve your business.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Burns, Scoutmaster in Charge

Lessons Learned:

- Wind is always a serious issue with boats; definitely an issue at Round Valley. Have a plan to deal with consequences of wind to avoid a lost weekend.
- If the wind traps your boats in camp, you need to have some alternate plans for returning everyone safely home.
- Many scouts over-packed. We would have been well served by a having a pack inspection the night before departure.
- Three adults knew our meal plan, however, all three were out of camp at dinner time. It is impossible to over-communicate. Be sure as many people as practical are in the loop.
- Return time predictability on a trip like this is low. Everyone needs to take that into account in their planning.
- Have plan A, plan B, plan C, and plan D when trying to accomplish something out of the main stream
- We elected to have a boat trip in October to enjoy a material cost break on boats, which we received. Nonetheless, planning water activities in October is risky. We could easily have had cold rain, frost, or snow.