

Paulinskill Trail Bike Adventure

Blairstown, NJ

September 21-23, 2012

Conceived in the doldrums of waning August vacation days when many scouts scrambled to complete summer book reports, this trip achieved the cherished status of an instant Troop 76 “classic”. It didn’t matter that we hadn’t camped since July. It didn’t matter that we had complicated logistics and 26 bikes to transport, some only hours old or worse – *borrowed*. It didn’t matter that we hadn’t biked as a troop in recent memory. It didn’t matter that the adults’ recovery would ultimately require a proverbial one quart tube of Preparation H. Not even the gremlins normally associated with the scout year’s first campout were enough to stop this one. Twenty six miles and over seven original dutch oven meals later, this group of 26 dedicated adventurers had conquered the full length of the Paulinskill trail – uphill for good measure.

Oh sure, mechanical and logistics problems appeared even before we left the parking lot Friday night at 5:30 6:30. The hands were already greasy with chain lube with last minute checks. The discouragement of heavy traffic on back roads to Camp Nobe might even have been enough to discourage a less determined crew. But give these guys a

couple of quality car hours to catch up on summer vacation gossip and a trip through McDonalds drive thru and they were nothing but happy campers. (Well then, maybe you should ride with Mr. B next time.....bring \$5)

Arriving at the Nobe powercut after dark, a short walk to Paul Bunyan campsite revealed a huge overhead tarp and good quality tables, platform & framed tents as well as a no-odor latrine that comprised what we affectionately refer to in BSA as *dee’-lux* camping accommodations. Fifteen minutes later the “no vacancy” sign went up at the Hilton. Darkness gave way to lantern lights and the promising glow of charcoal over a dutch oven containing blueberry cobbler.... or was it blackberry? Oreo cookie rationed Scouts hovered greedily around the adults 3 cheese (the horseradish cheddar with pear was divine), pepperoni, apple, pear, olive and anchovy delicacies. Like lion tamers we had to beat them back – go buy your own boys!

The pre-flight briefing for Saturday was conducted under propane lighting and resembled an allied war-room invasion planning session. The scouts



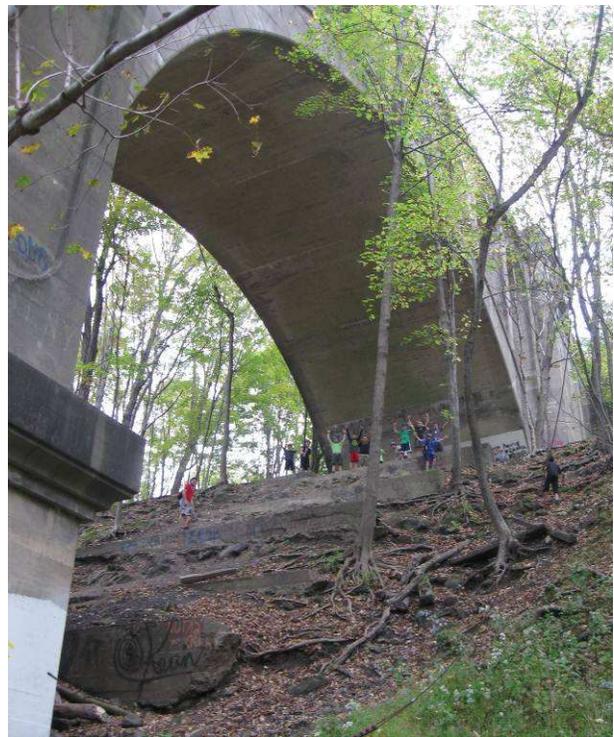
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had all the trail execution items delineated. That is to say, they knew who they were going to execute if specific tasks were not delineated. The adult logistics handling of the Paulinskill assault was a thing of carefully honed beauty. By taking 6 strands of spaghetti and dropping them on a piece of paper, the reader can reproduce a reasonable facsimile of the precisely orchestrated car movements. Or was it 7 strands? You just haven't lived until you see >20 bikes together in the transport trailer. And it all came off ok, with the help of a trailer hitch.



Retiring to sleep under cover of darkness and serenaded by real coyotes through the night, we similarly awoke to darkness to prepare breakfast in time for early equipment maneuvers and departure activities. Before you knew it, we were all magically transported to the starting line trying to charge the starting chute. We were able to hold them back long enough for the cover picture and then they were off in ~~hazardous-mob~~ orderly scout fashion. As the unsuspecting photographer, I was delayed 15 minutes trying to wash tire tread marks off my chest.



The day would be blessed with great weather, no serious injuries or mechanical problems, great scout fellowship, and many interesting scenic points. The first point entailed an impressive high arch bridge embankment which the scouts quickly scaled. A second occurred at the 5 mile mark at the glider port where we witnessed both tandem takeoff and solo landings. Somebody asked if Scout Mampe could be up there. (Yes he could.) Later in the morning we crossed multiple

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trestle bridges with excellent views of the flowing river. At one of these, we were treated to a view of a wide waterfall. Presently we began to pass several groups of trail horses and their associated road-apple road hazards. I understand most of our scouts even managed to not to fall in one during the remainder of the trip.

Despite early attempts to corral the group, we would eventually spread out along the trail, but never by more than warranted for a group of 26. Indeed, the leaders received numerous compliments from fellow trail users for being out with such a good looking group. It's a shame so many of our members had furniture disease because that Troop 76 t-shirt logo is so much easier to read when chests aren't packed away in drawers. I also understand there were gold nuggets along the trail and I could see scouts off the path occasionally answering



Leprechaun calls. I couldn't find any gold myself and was somewhat disappointed to learn later it was only nature calling. Hey, don't laugh, you'd be looking too with gold at \$1,700 an ounce.

We must have had a little too much fun in the morning ride because by 1 pm we were only eating lunch at the 1/2 way point. Water bottles nearly drained, a miraculous lunch reproduction of the loaves and fishes gospel account, apple cores now posted on the horse fence, and then the ride's second half became one big scenic blur. We could hear the urgent



encouragement of Mr. Cruz that "it's all downhill just up ahead, keep going guys!" This assertion ran directly contrary to the river's flow indication on my left. "Quiet, he's on a roll", quipped Mr. Barthelemy.

We came to our destination at last and an atmosphere of celebration met us which was comprised of scouts cheering for the pokey old guy crew and our young scout escort. In

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this context, our young Scouts Babbit and Despoto earned special recognition for truly fantastic trek finishes on 20" wheels. Twenty six miles completed felt good to the soul if not the actual bottom side. And while the memory of accomplishment would not soon fade, we were pretty sure the latter wouldn't either. We wishfully hypothesized that time in bucket car seats would significantly improve our urgent tailpipe issues. Unfortunately, not even our secret Indian friend – *Ibu profin* – was enough this time. Binding Committee decision: new 26 mile max rule on any future Troop 76 bike rides and mandatory ice packs for those over 40.

Back at camp an hour later, scouts prepared a late dinner under cover of darkness. This itself was not challenging enough so we ordered up a magenta colored radar storm cell to blow through camp during dinner prep. High winds, rain, lightning - didn't even phase them. Nothing was stopping these guys from a late meal. Tex-Mex, pork tenderloin dutch ovens, London broil on the grate, green beans and brown rice, all chased down by apricot pear cobbler, hot candied apples, and smores. Heck, we had the dutch ovens stacked three high and Mr. Bedard and Mr. Cruz even had



to do arithmetic to get the complex coal counts right. There was a lot of standing around going on and plenty of tea and coffee. Stories were retold here under the tarp, friendships kindled and rekindled amongst the hustle and bustle of youth. We had so much fun we couldn't even be bothered with cleanup tonight. Ultimately fantastic scout fellowship gave way to exhaustion and the camp in general retired early. A few lingered at the campfire savoring a successful day.

Morning welcomed us with beautiful weather and charlie horses, one of which I rode over to breakfast. Hot coffee, more food, and many satisfied scout faces made for a pleasant denouement to this year's classic opening adventure. As with all good scout things this trip came to a close with a clean camp, packed gear and a satisfied ride home. I understand some of the scouts even stayed awake. Thank you, Lord, for your provision of a safe, peaceful, and memorable start to a new year.

■ *Tom Bedard is an Assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 76 in Ringwood, NJ where he resides with his wife and three children. His son, Gabe, also participated on the adventure.*

