

## Split Rock Reservoir Canoe Adventure

Split Rock Reservoir, NJ

April 20-22, 2012

Consisting of a refreshing lake canoe overnight bivouac with crisp Spring nights and beautiful sunny days, this tent camping float trip was a welcome change to Winter's final gasps and served as a welcome signal that the outdoor camping season had returned. Enjoined by no small amount of anticipation from eager scouts, some who had never participated in an overnight canoe trip, our band of 38 total campers engaged this canoe island camping adventure with an enthusiasm commensurate with Spring's refreshing signs.

Departing Ringwood at the normal time Friday night, our monster truck convoy contained both new faces and plenty of kayak hood bling. Some fine truckbed kayak rack carpentry was noted by Mr. Barthelemy and Mr. Hahn. Indeed, in this configuration we resembled more of an aquatic elk herd than a truck convoy, but of course both sport a certain endearing scoutish charm.

Overwhelmed by excitement, the boys' eagerness to load trucks resulted in an abbreviated roll call and opening circle with our acting SPL commenting, well at least I got 'em loaded. Our destination was an island on Split Rock Reservoir by way of a Friday overnight in Camp Winnebago with a Saturday overnight canoe trip. Challenged by certain scheduling obstacles not all our members would arrive Friday night, but in true resilient Troop 76 fashion, everyone would be there in time for the big splash.

Arriving and checking in at camp, an impromptu Frisbee game gave way to a 1/2 mile backpack trek to the first campsite. Now there would be an awful lot to compliment this group on during the weekend, but gear-packing prowess simply was not on that list. It was abundantly clear that we had some bungee cord loving, can you help carry this, hoarders among us. Indeed, even some of the adults got in on this action with enough canned good ballast to not only



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right the titanic but feed the survivors too. The light mountain infantry division we were certainly not! The author reminds the troop that bunge cords were banned 3 years and a dozen Trail Tails ago and if it takes more than 1 trip to transport your personal gear, you need to deballast yourself. Otherwise Mr. Bedard has to carry his pre-assembled dutch oven pineapple upside down double recipe cake in himself, and that's just not right.



The campsite took shape in true Troop 76 fashion with the welcome and no vacancy signs going up in short order. Situated in a beautiful wooded campsite, we enjoyed a campfire circle overlooking Durham pond, platform tents, a fixed common shelter, and lightly used summer camp style latrines. Once canoes and kayaks were pre-positioned for Saturday am, everyone joined for a fun campfire replete with cracker barrel and said pineapple upside down cake. This despite erroneous cooking temperature guidance from Mr. Cruz' I-phone dutch oven app (shame on you) which indicated only 8 briquettes on the bottom and 18 on the top. Mr. B. made it ultimately right with 11 and 22 and a

lot of turning to produce a perfect golden brown delectable delight, sliced for 30. The raccoon even got the leftovers.

Several scouts would sleep outside on extremely comfortable camp mattresses. It did get into the low 30's overnight, but a nice warm bag and a stocking cap is a beautiful thing. I dreamed of scouts actually brushing their teeth, sleeping

in until after 8 am, and warm coffee already in the pot when I awoke....so clearly I got a good night sleep.

First light revealed a brisk cold, sunny, beautiful morning lake scene with campfire and scout stoves. Muffins augmented hot coffee and oatmeal just in time for our late arrivals. Fresh off



the Junior Formal, our older scouts looked bright-eyed and bushy-tailed for our adventurous aquatic trek. A few quick changes to the canoe assignments, announcements, and a quick pack and a campsite cleanup later and we were on our way to multiple waterfront departure locations; one for rental canoes and one

for personal vessels. We all wanted to thank Mr. Torchia, a.k.a. Woody, for that extra piece of firewood for each pack, it came in *real handy*

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during the portage later in the day.

Despite our prompt 10 am arrival at our launch zone, we had the privilege to well wish the tardy 9:30 am group off at a frog's hair past 10:30. This allowed our older group to rush unimpeded to the island camp zone and plant the flag for the King of Ringwood and we have no idea how they fared. Our band of merry scouts, led by patrol leaders and loaded for conquest, paddled like a bunch of drunken Nordic Vikings in a random zig zag pattern across the pond. Style points aside, they were still dry reaching the portage location. Greeted by Mr. Schaffer and Mr. Leo, we spent the next 45 minutes carrying all the gear, including Woody's gifts, 800 yards down a steep hill from Durham Pond to Split Rock Reservoir. We could review how much fun this was here, but the return trip would be soooo much more memorable.

The Vikings launched a second time into the first bay past several small islands, a beaver dam, and ultimately through a gap and into open water. The scene unveiled gorgeous blue sky, blue rippled water, green tree covered hills, and wispy white clouds carried along by a steady mild wind felt on the cheek. It was here our groups of 3 canoes (pods)



could put their backs into it. Some of us paddled a mile, others a mile and a half, but about 45 minutes later we were within eyesight of the main split rock destination and our comrades perched on treasure island with the Troop 76 flag unfurled.

Mostly dry, save the Swiss team, our young men made landing and scampered up the ground in search of prime camping locations and low taxes. For the next 24 hours or so, this was Troop 76 isle. And anyone arriving had better know the password or they would float you on the prison barge and make you walk the plank. Tents quickly pitched, brown bagged lunches were inhaled. After a rather eventful voyage to get here, the setting beautiful and boys well behaved, the best description for our island adventure was simply peaceful. Frisbee, fishing (including catching), firemaking, exploring, reading, sleeping, campfire fellowship and generally healthy boyish pursuits would fill the afternoon. Scout Cruz, seated gracefully in his kayak, expertly painted the lakefront with gentle,

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artistic fly rod brush strokes. And I had to wonder where else could 11-17 year olds and adults peacefully coexist, work together for common objectives, and dare I say actually enjoy each other's company. But this after all is Scouting.

Dinner was particularly fun and I enjoyed laying against a tree taking in a picturesque scene of the lake to the sound of our pocket rocket boiling water as dinner was prepared. (Truth was I was so sore I couldn't get up, but that's our secret.) In addition to our commercial stew and raman noodles, I saw plenty of canned goods right on fires; chef boy R dee, chunky soup, hot dogs, and other commercial meals like stroganoff. My personal favorite had to be the frozen breaded chicken breast I saw someone toasting right over a pocket rocket on a hand held grill. Hadn't seen that before.

A special fishing derby was convened after dinner. We had been fishing deep all day thinking the water was cold with very limited success. Against biologist advice, I threw a topwater popper out and – bam! - three bass later I was in the lead. As the sun set we had more luck and before we knew it we were half way across the lake in



the dark discussing night fishing techniques in Bass Tracker magazine. Mr. Breheney was holding out for one more species so he could claim the cycle. Good thing the boys lit a campfire to guide us home. The rest of the evening was filled with campfire fellowship, coffee, and of course more food and stories. We were treated to another cool, clear night and no rain. A beautifully played rendition of taps on the bugle was the perfect ending to the full day.

I was awakened by the twilight sounds of movement in the adult campsite in multiple directions. Thinking my dirty rat fishermen friends were trying to get the jump on the best fishing holes, I adorned my gear and shot out of the tent towards the canoes, tackle box in hand. Realizing too late it had been simply answers to nature's calls, I was now committed to the fishing expedition. I clunked the

paddle in mock defiance a couple times against the aluminum canoe and shoved off. It was a peaceful road less traveled during which time I caught another bass and many more memories of a quiet sunrise on the water. But Zzzzzz's would have been nice too. At least they had the coffee ready when I returned and we all shared another story during hot oatmeal around the breakfast fire.

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Alas it came time for our crew to pack and return from whence we came. These guys are really getting good, from older scouts leading to young scouts packing, and before we knew it, camp was broken and canoes were packed. A troop picture and a closing circle later we were on the high seas again in beautiful blue skies and a brisk headwind. What a fantastic paddle home, for many of these scouts only their first or second scout outing. We record it here for in 20 years, friends, you hopefully will have learned not to overlook such a good memory without notice. And this time on the voyage home we were pirates instead of Vikings, arggh!

Of course pirates with peg legs couldn't carry as much up the return portage as others. But with slightly lighter packs, no extra wood or canned ballast, and the technique of two carries now almost mastered (one for gear, one for empty canoe), the return trip even uphill was accomplished in good order with a little help from our secret Indian friend, ibuprofen.

One last jaunt across Durham pond back to the canoe rental proved much more challenging

than expected in a good 20 MPH headwind. Indeed, our most significant danger to swamp occurred on this stretch and we had plenty of adult kayak help at the ready for a contingency these young scouts would ultimately not require. Our dedicated group did a great job to work together and rise to both the physical and mental challenges.

It suffices to say that the next hour was filled with unloading, stacking canoes, getting cars, paying bills, heading for home and all the trivial stuff. I mention it only to thank the numerous adult participants who help keep things safe, affordable, and joyful through their actions and to give some explanation to spouses why they were so tired after a weekend of just sitting around lollygagging. I trust and pray that these investments being made in the lives of 28 young men and the skills and principles they are exposed to will reap many years of productive character return to our collective families, community, nation and beyond. *This* is scouting.

■ *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.*