

## Sandy Hook Adventure

Gateway National Recreation Area, Sandy Hook, NJ  
September 25-27, 2009

The much anticipated 2009 Scout year opener featured an exciting location with ocean fishing, beach swimming, tent camping, and a chance to dust off that backpack which had been sitting in the closet since July. If you couldn't get excited over this trip, you better call an ambulance because you may not have a pulse. Over a year in the reservation planning, this trip was a great season opener with 42 scouts and adults attending.

Arriving at church Friday night in time for a 6 pm departure, the first surprise was how organized and neat the troop shed appeared following an excellent cleanout by Scout M. Weller. His crew did such a good job I couldn't find a thing, but boy did it look good. (That's my story for forgetting all the AARPOP patrol items I was supposed to get and I'm sticking to it.) It's a good thing it took the team a few extra minutes getting cell phone numbers exchanged, and everybody loaded or the Indians might not have had patrol food. This was due to a fate tempting parent who's wrist sundial was running a bit shady.

The adult monster truck convoy team took great care making sure everyone was on the same map route directions for Friday rush hour beach traffic. In true Troop 76 fashion the team then rolled out of the parking lot in tight formation with cars going both left and right. As the lead vehicle, my first sign of trouble came when trying to exit 287 S onto 23 via the prescribed route I saw 3 teammates screaming by me in the middle lanes. I obviously hadn't gotten the email

detailing the minor directional change, but we were now back to my original route of choice. It felt good to be back in the saddle again with the rest of the posse and we already had our first funny scout memory of the year.

We had an enjoyable ride down and a chance to catch up on the summer events with our young scouts. A good discussion of proper outdoor clothing around wicking, warmth, and weather layers constituted an appropriate level of Scoutish instruction. I must apologize to the NJ DOT for not having \$0.35 change at the Exit 117 toll station and I hope they can spot me the \$25 fine since the machine simply wouldn't take the \$1 bill.

Arriving at Sandy Hook just after dark and driving north on the beach road, we were greeted to the strange sight of Mr. Reilley seated with a red light on his head as a parking lot beacon. Hard to miss that one I tell you. The scouts quickly unloaded packs and hiked the short ¼ mile to the wooded bayside campsite. As is typical for our gang, tents went up very quickly (if not



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actually correctly) and in 20 minutes camp was basically set.

The Ricky Raccoon welcoming committee didn't waste any time greeting our gang on their home turf. When I was a Scout at least they had the courtesy to wait until folks had gone to bed

to try and steal our stuff. I thought I even saw one with a little deputized NJ DOT badge and a cup asking the Troop Treasurer Mr. Torchia for \$0.35 in back tolls. Mr. Schaffer later explained that bay raccoons often feed at tide changes regardless of time of day.

The site boasted two picnic table shelters and two fire pits for the scouts and the adults. Cracker barrels and campfire games ensued and by all appearances you'd of thought these guys had done this a time or two. We had another large scout troop across the road from us unloading gear which created the need to play a cutthroat game of overnight parking lot palooza regarding legitimate parking spaces and hang tag permits. We also were in the flight path of JFK and got a good look at large planes all weekend long. So good we had to be careful with the star laser pointer.

We took an hour to try our luck at fishing in the nearby bay after dark, but the cool clear night was unwilling to acquiesce even a single scaled specimen. Instead, we were nearly cut off by rising tides although we did see a beautiful large crab or



two near the shore and a \$50 ticket issued to an unpermitted shore camper. Back in camp and after another coffee around waning campfires followed by a romantic cracker barrel around a 15-watt lantern mantle, it was time for lights

out. With all the zen snoring masters present, there was plenty of background noise to get a sound night sleep.

Morning light brought the sound of revile as well as coffee with flying pots and pans. The real trouble started with a column of fire from the adult stove when I went to light the big coffee burner. "Still got your eyebrows, Tom?" Mr. Brush asked. "Yes but I used to be a sandy blond," came the reply. The trouble continued when we realized the adult menu only had 1.6 eggs per man. We then had to swallow our pride and borrow butter (despite Mr. Big's personal supply of olive oil) and the meat consisted of ham in the veggie omelets rather than real pork snausages like some of the boy patrols had. We didn't even need a Swiss army knife corkscrew to unplug the bottle of whine that ensued. Good thing they didn't learn about the lack of dish

soap until later. Ok so the ARPOP's were a little rusty. Nothing that Lou's "bait trip" to the store couldn't rectify by lunch time.

The morning was spent with the scouts in bay shore exploration and some in-seine fishing. Mr



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Schaffer explained the various parts of the seine net—handles, weights, floats, and bag— and then led the demonstratio

n of how to catch and retrieve small baitfish and small crustaceans along the shore. Few of us had ever seen this and as usual our resident naturalist was up to the task. The first net brought in small silver side baitfish and subsequent casts brought in small bluefish, croaker, crabs, and shrimp. Later casts became

even more interesting and at one point Mr. Leo and Mr. Reilly both disappeared in deep holes while



using the net. Way to sacrifice the body for the team boys. By morning's end we had over 75 small fish, enough to capture the attention of local law enforcement. We let Mr. Wilson handle that one given his extensive prior experience with a variety of local, county, state, and federal agencies.

With several fishing poles in the water and a world record 800 yard kayak assisted cast from Mr. Brush, you'd have thought somebody could have hauled something out of the ocean. The tension to catch something – *anything* -was palpable. Mr. Cruz nearly jumped out of his sandals when I crossed his line and gave it a teasing tug. We were all

hopeful to see Mr. Hahn get a Nantucket sleigh ride in his kayak outrigger, but Moby Dick was nowhere to be found this day.

Lunch consisted of a delightful cold cut selection, veggies, fruit, and cookies. We saw at least one scout patrol attempt grilled cheese while another had raccoon leftovers from a pre-packed brown bag lunch. We'll add the preventative bear/raccoon bag instruction next time. Following a brief siesta, we were then off to the ocean-side beach for a sunny, pleasant afternoon in the surf.

Swimming, surf fishing and several other activities greeted our large crew at the shore and the scouts wasted no time hitting the surf. Some of them even hit golfballs with the sand

wedge. Sand boards, boogie boards, horseshoes, bocci ball, frisbee, football, kite flying, and a wedding down the beach were

plentiful activities sufficient to occupy a relaxing afternoon. One scout even dug a hole as deep as he was tall – amazing what a plastic shovel can do. Despite our 10 ready surf poles and fresh squid bait, we couldn't even catch a piece of driftwood on this otherwise idyllic afternoon.

But not for lack of trying. By 4:30 we were heading back to camp



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to put ourselves in a winning position to atone for our breakfast meal efforts.

Whether it was hunger or shame I don't know, but the ARPOP gang became *one with the grill* at dinner time. While the Scouts worked as patrols to put together some pretty decent looking meals themselves, the adults fired up steak, chicken and shrimp kabobs replete with 3 different marinades and 4 different vegetables. The teamwork was outstanding as fire, water, land, and sea all came together in culinary excellence. All hands on deck and not even a Chef's minor need for first aid on one was going slow this train down. Ron Popiel would have been proud of our Scout rotisserie as we rotated the whole kabob grill to ensure a perfect, balanced, savory heat. The smell of charcoal and terriaki marinade was outdone only by the taste of Dutch oven pineapple upside down cake desert. Bam! Now that's bumping it up a notch boys. What time's cracker barrel again?

It was then time for some guitar playing and coffee drinking around the fire as darkness settled in. Plenty of split wood from the maul over by the complementary log pile. The scouts enjoyed a bit of night fishing and additional campfire fellowship throughout the evening. Our friend Ricky Raccoon was greeted with a high power laser beam square between his beady eyes as he stole the remaining cheese log from the adult picnic table. It will take a real paint ball gun (or

more) to scare him away next time. Late rain prompted us to try out the 12 foot pop-up. We even got a video of a beloved scout leader snoring in his chair and drooling on himself for the year end slide show.

There was nothing ambiguous about the 12 hours of continuous overnight rain we experienced or the consequences associated with poorly setup tents. It was a good chance for Mr. Byram to review proper use of rainflies, ground cloths, and staking technique. We also had a raingear fashion show which had to be censored due to some very skimpy outfits. Contestants without raingear will again be disqualified by Mr. Leo next time so please don't forget to pack this key safety equipment.

Breakfast in the rain was fairly quick with hot oatmeal, fruit cocktail, coffee and any leftovers. The decision was made to break camp early and head for home in light of the inclement weather. We saw reasonably good teamwork on the tear down, but we hope to see more independence on packing up personal backpacks on future trips. Nothing like practice at home to prepare for performance in the field, Moms and Dads.

By 11:30 the monster truck convoy was loaded and headed for home. It had been an excellent, well attended first campout of the season. With all this activity and great scout memories, we won't even miss the patch.■



*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.*