

**Troop 957
El Ranch Cima
Cockrell River Camp
June 25-30, 2006**

Sunday June 25, 2006

Well, as the old hands among you might expect, the caravan was greeted by rain as they pulled in around 2:00 pm. It only lasted around 30 minutes though, so things are off to an auspicious start. Chris has made a mental note to himself to leave an hour earlier next year, since they were supposed to get there at 1:00. Current conditions as of 7:00 pm were sunny skies, with a few puffy white clouds. The boys are extremely well fed, as they had a feast of chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes, salad (I wonder how many of them ate that!), corn, rolls and vanilla cake for dessert. Milk and iced tea were the drinks of choice. They should now be doing their swim checks, having missed the scheduled session due to their late arrival. This will be followed by completion of camp set-up and flashlights out at 10:00 to 10:30 pm. Oh, and for those "lucky" enough to be tomorrow's grub-getters, a 5:50 am wake up to pick up breakfast for everyone. Not something they will want to miss.

Barbara

Monday June 26, 2006

The first official day of camp went very well--no rain, a generally nice day weather-wise. The grub-masters did their duty and brought cereal and donuts to everyone. Lunch was turkey sandwiches. At the time Chris called, the walk up "appetite hill" had not occurred. All he could tell about dinner was that it involved a salad bar. The boys will start cooking tomorrow.

Today was pretty much "try and figure out the schedule" day. They got the rope spinners made, but so far no rope, so they are a bit behind. They did have free swim, and a troop climb up the climbing tower so they can rappel down for camping merit badge is scheduled. The boys have discovered the camp trading post, and it is amazing how hot that sending money gets in the 90 degree temperatures--enough to burn a hole in their pocket until they just have to spend it. As stated pre-camp, the adults are letting them make their own decisions in that regard. All in all, the adult leadership is doing an outstanding job of staying out of the boys' way, and are enjoying themselves thoroughly in the process. In fact Mike Massimino really wants to know if there is any chance of a launch delay so he can stick around for the whole week!

Barbara

Tuesday June 27, 2006

We have had the first cases of homesickness, and the cooking and cleaning have begun, so camp is officially in full swing. The boys discovered for themselves just how much grease can come out of a package of bacon, and how much work it is to clean up afterwards. As a result, they were thirty minutes late to their. Then they found out how hard it was to boil water for hot dogs (must be a story there), and were again 30 minutes late. The first opportunity at cleaning bathrooms was met with less than 100% success. One scout got the bright idea that to avoid having to do any laundry; he would simply take his showers fully clothed. In the 'he brought what!' department, Adam Jones was discovered to have brought enough baseball gloves to outfit a small team. :)

On the activity front, they have done their first basket. Parents are asked to ooh and ah over them no matter what they look like. They probably will complete the second basket and the chair, but there might not be enough time for leatherworking. They are not doing any better in the homework department. Many of them, remembering the spoon feeding of Cub Scout days, have not done the required reading for Tenderfoot, so the post-camp BORs may have fewer scouts than expected. Chris took photos of the tower exercise last night. Any parent afraid of heights is asked to not look at them. Tonight's main event will be the infamous Death March 1, a 6 mile round trip trek up to Sentinel Peak to watch the sunset. Last night the boys lasted all of 10 minutes after flashlights out. Tonight it will probably be closer to 5. Exhaustion can be a good thing!

Barbara

Wednesday June 28, 2006

Today marked the leaders change out and the halfway point--as well as being the day the mailman finally arrived. Chris said it took two trips to bring it all to the campsite. I am sure that the contents helped with any lingering homesickness. Today was also the first time the latrine cleaners got it right. Be sure and give the boys plenty of chances to polish their cleaning skills at home!

The boy-cooked breakfast du jour was French toast, in some cases without the French as Chris put it. The boys are now working their square baskets, square being a relative term. They have also succeeded in completing the second parental ooh and ah opportunity--6 to 7 ft. lengths of handmade rope. After working on their knots, the first years went off for a one hour trail clearing service project. This was to be followed by a no doubt welcome swim in the river. And for you non-FCE parents, never fear, your sons are also staying busy. In fact I was on the cell phone with Chris when one of them came up looking for a band-aid, and Chris had to remind him that merit badge was supposed to be wood-carving, not finger-carving. Other than that, there have been the standard number of scratches and scrapes, as well as a couple of sprains the applicable families were notified about separately, but all in all everyone is actually doing quite well. The leaders are continuing to push fluids into them however they can. Tonight's excuse will be the traditional watermelon seed spitting contest.

Barbara

Thursday June 29, 2006 (status#1)

Two more days left. With five summers of first year camp blogging experience, I can say that things are definitely on track. The boys are going great guns and having a blast. The leaders expect the standard groans of protest when it is time to pack up, including from the ones who had a touch of homesickness early on. From yesterday's watermelon seed spitting contest, Chris K. took the honors with a 17 footer. Ryan F. was a disappointed second at 15 feet. The official judging committee's decision was, however final--Chris's foot foul did not occur until after the shot had been made. Raymond M. won in the accuracy division on his third attempt. Persistence pays off!

The boys also did well with their service project. They were the first to volunteer, and the nature center was so impressed with their hard work that they got a guided tour. As a result of that extra opportunity, their river swim was cut back to 40 minutes, but no one complained. Semper

Gumby is after all the Boy Scout leader's motto. Expect to find some fossils coming back with them, and a lot of happy memories. The post-summer camp slide show at the next court of honor is likely to be rather lengthy. :)

The cooking has improved tremendously. Today's special was breakfast tacos. Everyone should be very proud of their sons. They are waking on their own (the troop has little travel alarm clocks), getting up and dressed, getting/preparing the food and setting the table all without any adult intervention. At least one scout has expressed interest in learning how to operate the Boy Scout washing machine! Boy leadership at its finest, which is after all what boy scouting is all about.

More to come later, I am sure, since Chris usually calls around dinner.

Barbara

Thursday June 29, 2006 (status#2)

More news from the front. For the non-first year families, Patrick T. and Taylor A. have been busy. They both now know what it is like to have to row an intentionally swamped row boat as part of their water rescue training. Patrick also succeeded in diving to the bottom of the river to bring back a pair of goggles someone else had lost. The Order of the Arrow candidates (James M., Renny H. and Jody Williford) have successfully completed their ordeals and will be initiated tonight, as will the new Brotherhood of the Order of the Arrow members (Fletcher C., Chase W. and Doug Williford).

As for the rest of the troop, tonight is something called Meadow Madness which involves horseshoes, face painting and branding of completed leatherwork (no, this does not include athletic shoes). About half the boys have chosen to go to this, while the other half have decided to continue working on their baskets and chairs. This half may be the same group that when offered free time earlier chose to grab some balls from the troop's resident sports fanatic and have a pick up game. Rest is no longer in their vocabulary when there is fun to be had; however some are starting to realize that if they don't get after it, they may not earn the badge or rank they came for. Per the leaders earlier, most of them are on track to receive the swimming and basketry merit badges, and all should receive the art badge.

Tomorrow's status will be the last. After that the cell phone calls will start Saturday when they are about an hour outside of town, if they follow the normal plan.

Barbara

Friday June 30, 2006

And the party's over--well, two out of the three, anyway. The troop came in 7th at the Cockrell River Roundabout, a scout type megathon (is that even a word?) involving such things as chugging water, tying knots and other scout skills, drawing pictures of their favorite staff member and a no-holds barred nature quiz. Party no. 2 was Taylor A's early birthday celebration, complete with a party-in-a-box that made him extremely popular with the rest of the troop. No. 3 will be the traditional closing campfire which should be starting shortly.

Several of the boys have had or are very close to having their scoutmaster conferences, the last step before their boards of review. Five completed the hour and a half duration 1 mile swim in

the river--Raymond M., Patrick Z., Ryan F., Adam J. and Daniel M. According to Chris, they are about 75% packed, and will be ready to leave by about 8:15 am. Dads Taggart and Ferguson will be driving up there to provide enough seat belts to get all the boys back. Since BSA rules do not allow for caravanning, it will be totally dependent on the driver's tolerance for driving a car full of boys without extended breaks as to when any individual scout makes it back. They will call when the first vehicle reaches Sealy. Chris's rough estimate is before 1:00, and yes, they will have lunch on the way. Once they arrive at the church, they will all have to stay until everything is completely unpacked. Yes, learning that privileges don't come without attached responsibility is a hard lesson when you are only 11 and overtired from too much fun. I wouldn't feel too sorry for them, however, remember that they (unlike the exhausted leaders :)) get over 3 hours on the trip back to snooze if they want.

And now for the bad news. That, for those of you who have not done this before, would be the post-campout laundry. I didn't hear much about mud, since there (so far) hasn't been much rain, so you may have it easier than past years. Even so, expect a lot of dirt and stink from wet/sweaty clothes that were not allowed to dry or be put in plastic bags before packing. Expect to not get everything back that your son took. Expect to find unusual items (hopefully nothing alive) stuck in socks and pockets. Expect to find items that are a) two sizes too large or b) 3 sizes too small for your boy. This includes shoes. If you are very lucky, they will be labeled and you can arrange your own trades. If not, bring them to the next troop meeting for the traditional post-summer camp clothing swap out. All unlabeled, unclaimed items will eventually go to the church.

Barbara