

HA Trek on the Goodwater Trail - April 15-17, 2005

This weekend the HA Scouts went on their first 15 mile backpacking trip. Our Backpacking merit badge requirements state we must make three, 15 mile, three days with two different campsite hikes. Well, 6 Scouts (James MacLean, James Wright, Renny Hall, Fletcher Counts, Brentley Rehak and Chase Williford), and the leaders accomplished the 1st of these hikes by trekking 16.5 miles of the Goodwater Trail around Georgetown Lake which is just north of Austin. We had spectacular weather, a great but challenging hike, and accomplished all our set goals, plus a few more we had not even thought of.

Basically, we wanted to try the new packs out on some rugged terrain with some ups and downs and to make the Scouts aware of just what is needed to be comfortable and what is required to remain safe while miles away from civilization. Goodwater Trail gave us just that. Saturday morning after shuttling trucks, we started our hike at Russell Park. Our start out elevation was about 834' which held steady for the first 6.5 miles. This proved to be a beautiful hike down a caliche trail with blue bonnets mixed in with the prickly pear cactus and lots of oak, pecan and elm trees.

This was a great start for the Scouts to learn about the order of hiking, what the Scout, the Leader and the Drag responsibilities are. Each of these three positions was passed on to a different Scout at the lunchtime break at Tejas Campsite. This was a really cool stopping point, because the San Gabriel River which flows into Goodwater Lake goes right past this campsite. At this point, packs were dropped and boots were stripped. We spent the next hour eating lunch and wading in the river.

The second half of Saturday started to tax our hiking skills. We had 4.5 more miles to cover before arriving at Sawyer Camp for our second night. You might think 4.5 miles would be easy, but the elevation started to get interesting. The trail started to have dips, turns, inclines, rocks, cactus, creek crossings and a Venture Crew who thought they could beat our Scouts to Sawyer Camp. No such luck, they were right on our tail for about 3.5 miles until they finally gave up. Our Scouts would stop for nothing, not even their leaders....who backed them up all the way, literally. We made it to Sawyer Camp in record time. One of the Scouts stated in their post hike write-up, "It was not what we expected". Sawyer was true backcountry. There was not a lot of level ground and of course, not the pretty stream flowing past, which the Scouts expected. But we made do and had a nice campsite where the Scouts learned about having a separate cook area, the job of the Camp Czar and how important it was to keep all food and smelly items hanging from a branch at night and not in their tent.

Sunday morning we took to the trail about an hour behind the Venture Crew. (Leaders, we need to work on their "Get up and Go" skills.) Sunday's trail had a lot more twist and turns to it. We made one wrong turn, which took us ½ mile out of the way. Our Scouts simply pulled out the maps, determine where we went wrong and we were back on track again. Now the hike really got hilly with lots of the trail crowded with Prickly Pear cactus and Pencil cactus. There was only one slight casualty by cactus, which the use of tweezers and the loss of one pant leg solved. All and all, the Scouts had "Hamburgers" on their minds, so stopping for a small cactus injury was not going to hold them back. However, we did take time to stop off at Crockett Gardens. This is a natural waterfall from Crockett Springs that flows into Georgetown Lake. It was a spectacular view with lots of ferns, water plants and irises blooming. From the gardens we trekked on for two more miles to the end of the trail at Cedar Break Park.

This was a great 1st big trek for our HA guys. For those HA's who were not able to make this hike, do not worry, we will be going back. We need to also recognize the fact that these hikes are not just "All Fun", they require the Scouts to work as a team, and to call upon a drive and stamina that they are just now realizing that they really have. Parents, please give each of these HA Scouts a big pat on the back for a job very, very well done.

Your HA Leaders,

Mark Rehak

Jody Williford

Doug Williford