

THE JAMES RIVER TRIP

9:00 AM in the church parking lot the morning the trip began.

There was nobody in the parking lot. It was completely empty. An eerie silence penetrated the body of the car after the engine was shut off. We were alone.

“Are you sure it was nine o’clock?” Asked my mom in a threatening tone.

“Umm..”

“MICHAEL DAVID GOODLING”

“What?” I hated it when she used my full name. It always meant that I was in big trouble.

“NOBODY ELSE IS HERE! WE PROBABLY MISSED THE TRIP

THANKS TO YOU! THEY LEFT WITHOUT US!”

A solitary truck pulled in to the parking lot. Our car fell silent as we watched it pull closer. Suddenly Phillip recognized it.

“It’s Joel! We’re saved! We’re saved!”

Joy flooded through every inch of my veins. I was so happy to be alive, that I felt like I was above physical pain and suffering. I felt like I was on top of the world.

A few hours later, at the trailhead of the trail that would eventually lead us to Thunder Hill shelter.

“OUCH! Hey Nock It Off You Idiots! OUCH!”

The adults went to shuttle cars. This left the rest of us goobers to entertain ourselves. So, we took part in the most revered and popular past time of scouts of all ages. We threw rocks at each other.

The parents got back, and we took our customary picture at the sign of the trail where we start out. Thankfully, our smiles did not break Joel’s camera.

We hoisted on our packs, and started trudging up the trail. As I recall, the trail was not that difficult, although it did slope upwards, and left all of us sweeter and more out of breath than we started. Adam, who seemed to be one of the fastest, lead with me and Philly hot on his tail. We arrived at a sign post and waited for everyone else. The weather was beautiful, clear but

a little on the cool side. Joel came up and snapped a few pictures before we headed out to finish our hike to the campsite.

We arrived into a beautiful campsite with a lot of trees, a fire pit, a wooden shelter, and a very close water source. It was great. we were the only ones there, but it was only about 3:00. Someone else was bound to stop here. And some one did.

Around 3:30 a voice that was unfamiliar floated up the hill from where the adults had set up camp. The Voice seemed wise and aged, with a hint of boyishness. He laughed along with the adults then came up the hill. An old man came into view, wearing all black clothes that looked very worn, and carrying a very small and light pack. His long thick beard and thin wiry frame made him look old, yet agile and fit. He ambled up with a small and began chit-chatting pleasantly. After a minute or so, he sat cross-legged on the hard ground and began to get out his cooking gear. Numerous pots and pans were pulled gently out of his bag, along with a bottle that contained a very small amount of liquid in the bottom. When the man, whose trail name was Doc Gnarly or something like that, saw the bottle he paused. The bottle seemed to be of great importance, and his muttering and grumbling seemed to be caused by the lack of liquid in the bottle. Doc reached into his

backpack, pulled out a cigarette, ripped of the filter, then began to hastily smoke.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, trying to be helpful to this obviously very experienced hiker.

“Well, it seems...” He took a puff on his cigarette “...It seems like I don’t have enough fuel to cook dinner tonight.” I offered to help him cook his dinner, as we were on a short trip, and had plenty of fuel.

“But make sure it’s okay with your leader” the grizzled man cautioned “I wouldn’t want to get you in trouble now.”

We soon had a couple cups of boiling water Doc was as happy as a clam. He cooked his dinner and ate it all like a man who hasn’t eaten in a month.

I looked up as another thru hiker walked up, whose name nobody seems to recall. With a beard much like Doc’s he ambled up to the shelter mumbled his salutations, and began slowly and painfully taking of his boots and socks to examine his feet. I judged him to be about college age, with less backpacking experience than Doc, but much more than the boys in the Troop.

The Troop, being their own fun-loving group was joking, taunting, tossing the Frisbee around and almost hitting Doc and the other Dude with it.

Then up came a guy whose trail name was Naked Son. He was of college age also, and was much more talkative than both Doc and the other dude. He was very easy going, and liked talking to the other thru hikers as much as he liked talking to the scouts about what they did as far as merit badges and other cool stuff like that. If you ask the Guys who their favorite person they met was, the whole troop would say Naked Son.

Several others came and went, but they didn't sleep in the shelter. Pixie and Pine Dragon ate at the shelter, but camped out somewhere, and left early in the morning. Another couple decided to avoid the troop altogether and went far away to sleep.

Lojack was the last to show up, and was huffing and puffing unlike any of the other backpackers. His pack looked unusually heavy, and had lots of gear strapped to the outside. He had already spent last night with Doc, and had no problem chatting it up. He had a very odd, dry sense of humor that I found to be hilarious. He quickly became another fascinating character.

After we had eaten dinner and cleaned up, the whole troop took a short hike to see guillotine rock, which is this huge boulder that got wedged between two vertical rock faces, is suspended over the trail. Naturally, we climbed on it. The weather was wonderful and the rock formation was well worth the hike.

We got back and spent the rest of the night swapping stories about the trail and telling lots of jokes. I started a fire that was really hard to start, but once it got going, it was a very big, hot and beautiful fire. Naked Son was very impressed and kept saying how great scouts was and how happy he was and how he wished he could do that.

About half the troop shared the shelter with the thru hikers, the other half slept in tents (or hammocks). That was my first night in a Hammock, and let me tell you, those things take some getting used to. However, Corey and Jeff swear by theirs, so I'll at least use it for a while before I judge it.

The next morning we had oatmeal, and left way after the thru hikers. Those folks get going quick.

We had a killer hike that day, which seemed like it was all down hill. Down hill absolutely kills your legs. Your knees and Thighs scream "Enough already!" and you have only gone 2 miles. We covered 12.4 miles. I'm still tired.

After that Grueling hike we showed up at our campsite Tired and Cranky. There was one other group at the campsite, and they didn't really talk to us or do anything near the shelter, so we basically had the place to our selves. The site was nice, and was ten feet from a creek to pump water, and a nice, large bridge over the water was fun to play on. Everyone was so tired that we all went to bed at around 9. Everyone had plenty of room in the shelter, and only a few boys slept outside, but all the adults camped way on the other side of the stream.

The next day we got up, ate breakfast and got the 2.2 miles to the cars knocked out in a flash. We were on the road in no time. I there is one thing I learned from this experience, it was Colin Fletcher's 2nd law of thermodynamic walking which is GIVE YOUR BALLS AIR. Guys on the Trail wore kilts. Yeah. It's weird, but it works. So, that's about it. I'd like to thank every one who went for making this trip a short yet enjoyable experience.

Adios.

