

SCOUTS-L

BSA CAMPING

Date: Fri, 4 Nov 1994 23:55:01 -0500 (EST)
From: "Michael F. Bowman" <mfbowman@cap.gwu.edu>
Subject: Re: Gen-Fall Scout Camping
To: Laura Smyk <lsmyk@FLASH.LAKEHEADU.CA>

Laura,

There are a lot of successful ways of helping new Scouts adapt to the great outdoors experience. Probably the best of them gently ease them into the experience or pair them with more experienced Scouts.

A few months ago we discussed backyard camping. Many noted it was a great way to start new Scouts towards camping, but not a substitute for a good camping program. The idea would be to have a patrol camp in a backyard with some inside and outside cooking - sort of a shakedown for the real thing.

Another way is when a new patrol does its first camp, ask the older Scouts (here the Patrol Leader's Council) to consider pairing Scouts from an older patrol with the new patrol and sharing chores - firebuilding, cooking, clean-up, etc.

The key is to motivate your youth leaders to see that it is important that the first experience be successful for the new boys and not a trial by fire. If they take the bit and help, most things will work themselves out. If most of the Scouts are new, help guide the youth leaders to plan a graduating set of activities from very simple and easy to more challenging.

Yours in Scouting, Michael F. Bowman, a/k/a Professor Beaver
Deputy District Commissioner Exploring, GW Dist., NCAC, BSA
Speaking only for myself, but with Scouting Spirit . . .
_____ mfbowman@CAP.GWU.EDU _____

Date: Sat, 20 May 1995 02:01:26 -0400 (EDT)
From: "Michael F. Bowman" <mfbowman@capaccess.org>
Subject: Re: About the Boys [Semi Long] - Scout Camp v. Fun Week?

Erik,

Your question is heartening! This gets at the basics of the program and is a question that many unit leaders face.

We could do a rehash of the goals and methods of Scouting from Scoutmaster Fundamentals here, but you probably have already picked up on this line; e.g. building character, citizenship, etc., which means growth.

Let me cut to the chase here. The program is about personal challenge, but needs also to be fun for it to work. None of your Scouts will hang around very long, if the program is boring and unchallenging.

What is fun? Is it just hanging around at a campground with no particular program for a week? What are they going to do for a week? What's it going to be like after about three days of just hanging around? Sounds like a few of the adults are thinking of fun as just sitting around and letting the boys find their own entertainment. Pretty soon the Scouts will figure out that they don't have to be in Scouting to have this level of non-program excitement (a step above couch-potato) I would guess that unless the Scouts have planned some stuff that's really interesting to them, that such an adventure will have a doubtful outcome. Have the Scouts been asked what they would like to do or is this just the adults that are carping about how tough it's going to be at camp? Ask the Scouts what they want to do? If they want a fun week of their own making, it probably could be a good thing, but they'll have to come up with all of the resources on their own with your help. And if they do plan a trip with definite goals, places to see, things to do, then it starts sounding like as much work as going to Scout Camp doesn't it.

Sure Scout Camp can sound intimidating, but it doesn't have to. If you are using the patrol method and Patrol Leader Council, the Scouts should be doing a lot of the planning. What do they want to do at camp? Almost every camp offers a lot of possibilities ranging from idle participation to non-stop excitement. At National Camp School the staff learns that it is important that each Scout take time to watch the clouds and that leaders need some time to let their Scouts run the program. Many seasoned Scouters know that the most indispensable item in their kit, is a good camp chair - sounds like hard duty ;-).

While the camp will offer merit badges, challenge courses, and expect uniforms, it is up to the unit's leadership (SM & PLC) to decide what parts of the program they will utilize - how many merit badges, hikes, etc. The camp program can be fairly well tailored to the needs of each Scout.

Some elements of the camp program will be required - flag ceremonies, uniforms, campfires and the like.

Now just what will happen to a Scout at camp? He will learn that he is part of a team and begin to help that team compete. He will learn to

overcome challenges. Most likely he will gain proficiency in a few areas, at least enough to complete all or some rank requirements and/or merit badge requirements, ensuring recognition. Is this fun? Check out the smiles when the badges are awarded! But bear in mind that Scout Camp is not and should not be a merit badge factory. Better to have a healthy mix of fun and work.

Ask the Scouts what they think fun is. You'll probably find they love to swim, canoe, hike, try sports, shot at the range, try a bow and arrow, etc. They'll also find it fun to survive challenges together. More they will come back with great memories about how well they did, how they managed to overcome things. They will also develop a sense of fellowship with the other Scouts at camp.

Every week that I was a Camp Program Director, my favorite time was Saturday after the closing flag ceremony when the parents arrived at camp to pick up their sons. It was wonderful to watch. They were tired, dirty, and fully of excitement at what they had done and just couldn't wait to tell some of what they had done. Maybe it was a grueling hike, making a meal in a reflector oven, catching a fish, canoeing backwards down a rapids, laughing at a joke, or just a general sense of fun, but the change in the Scouts from when they unloaded to when they left was clearly evident. Here Camp is farther away and when I've been to parking lot to greet incoming buses from camp after a four hour trip, the Scouts have been a bit more tired, but nonetheless full of stories and excitement. Sounds like they couldn't have had any fun, right. ;-)

What about the uniforms? Same as you learned in basic training - they help instill a sense of pride, act as a social leveler (no one needs to feel bad that they can't afford the latest \$\$\$ outfit or shame that they didn't catch onto what was the cool outfit for the week), provide a means for recognition, and give a sense of belonging. But realize this is only for part of the day when uniforms are required. Most of the time they'll be wandering about in swim trunks and a t-shirt (you will be thankful they got wet - they hate the thought of showers).

Now as to the adult leaders - remember the chair? Use it! The camp is for the Scouts. The leaders will of course help make sure that everyone has a program of activities and oversee things, but this is a lab for boy leadership. Let them learn. Sit back once in awhile and let them try it out, even if they make mistakes and don't do everything perfectly. They'll learn more this way. Oh and don't forget to buy a coffee mug at the trading post to go with the chair. Yeah, there's plenty for a leader to do, but it is important to remember that the leader is not there to do it for the Scout. They are there to have fun, learn and grow.

Now is a great time to finalize your plans for camp. Coach the PLC or in a small Troop the SPL and PL on selecting a variety of activities both for fun and advancement. Give them ownership over what they can choose. You'll probably be pleasantly surprised at the result.

Now you can tell the other adults to relax and realize this might be easier than they thought. You can also tell them there will be more at camp for the Scouts than what they could put together with the Scouts for

a fun week. Take advantage of the opportunities. Have fun!

**Speaking only for myself in the Scouting Spirit, Michael F. Bowman
Prof. Beaver, Nat. Capital Area Council, BSA mfbowman@CAPACCESS.ORG**