

Trip Report – Davis Mountains and BTSR (November 19-25, 2005)



The HA group made it home from the Davis Mountains and BTSR on Friday night! It was a successful trip, meaning 7 people (5 scouts, 2 adults) went up into the mountains and 7 people returned.

We started our hike about 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, traveling about 3.5 miles up the Black Trail at BTSR to our 1st campsite, Whiskey Bottle Tank. The boys, especially Alex “The Nuge” Berno found out why you wear long pants at BTSR. We made camp and all 5 boys slept under one tarp. We filtered our water from the water tanks that were set up at this camp and ate our homemade backpacking meals.

On Monday we left Whiskey Bottle Tank and traveled, by way of the Green Trail, about 3.5 miles to our next campsite, The Pole Pens. Along the way we encountered some of the BTSR horses that run loose on the property. We stopped and took some pictures of the boys and the horses. We set up camp and made a day hike to The Notch, where we ran into the Cavalcade Group. We discussed our plans for the Tuesday hike with the Cavalcade Leaders and got some raised eyebrows. They thought our scheduled route was going to be extremely difficult. From The Notch we continued on to Needle Rock, one of the important landmarks at BTSR. About 4:30 p.m. we headed back to The Pole Pens to eat dinner, play games and finally bed down for the night.

On Tuesday morning we set out on the Silver Trail to do our “extremely difficult” hike to Ezra’s Bedground. Well, it turns out that the Cavalcade Leaders were right! The Silver trail is poorly marked and we missed a turn. At one point Renny had to get on his hands and knees in order to avoid the “Catclaw” bushes and to even see the trail. We traveled up a draw and had to regroup. Please keep in mind that there are 3 Silver trails at BTR and all the trails look like game trails. Jody and I had our maps and GPS and knew where we were, but some of the boys, one in particular, thought we were lost. So we sent them on a trail finding expedition, and sure enough they found the Silver trail. Unfortunately, it was not the one we were suppose to be on. No problem, we immediately jumped to plan “B” and traveled to the OA campsite and by passed Ezra’s Bedground. The Silver Trail coming down is a very steep, rocky slope that could have caused problems, but not for our guys. They traveled down that slope like a bunch of mountain goats. At the OA campsite we found that the site was being occupied some more of the BTR horses and a mule. The mule wanted to stay and camp with us and taste our backpacks, so we had to hide our gear down in the creek bed and persuade the mule to leave. We dropped our gear and hiked back to The Notch for a little R&R and a “spit bath”. Upon returning to camp the boys discovered that they were a full 6 miles behind schedule. With only 2 days left on the trip, moral started to slip. But never fear, Renny Hall can liven up any campfire gathering. James “Duct Man” MacLean showed us how to fashion a spoon out of a twig and duct tape (He lost his spoon 4 times on the trip) I don’t think I have ever heard the boys laugh so much. In the middle of the night, with all the boys fast asleep, I heard a noise. I thought it might be the horses coming back into camp, but my flashlight revealed a couple of coyotes sniffing around the camp.

Wednesday morning, a full day behind in miles, we broke camp and headed down the Green Trail back through the BTR HQ on our way to Forbidden Mountain. James Wright kept asking if we could just stay at the BTR HQ and was told each time, No! We stopped at HQ, refilled our water, dumped trash and headed out on a 3.5 mile hike up the jeep road to Forbidden Mtn. cabin. This was one tough hike! At one point, we actually had to leave BTR property in order to reach our destination, but we had the landowner’s permission. The jeep road was, thank goodness, a series of long, steep switchbacks that gave the Leaders a chance to catch our breath and rest our screaming legs. Once again our guys went up this trail like it was nothing, but always waiting for the “old people” to catch up. Once on top of Forbidden Mountain we made camp by the FM cabin. The boys wanted to sleep in the cabin rather than pitch their tarp, but we said no. Once we set up camp, we hiked further into the mountains discovering a deserted Cavalcade camp, a lake called White Tank and Ezra’s Bedground. We double-timed it back to the cabin because we thought a storm was coming in (it didn’t). Once back at the cabin, the boys discovered that not only had they made up the miles they were behind, they were now ahead of schedule. There was a sudden upswing in the moral. This was the first night that we did not have fire due to the high winds (which by the way, blew 10-20 mph the entire trip) and dry conditions on the mountain. We let the boys play cards inside the cabin by the light of their flashlights. Once again, I have never heard these boys laugh so much and have so much fun.

Thursday morning we got up, broke camp and left FM at 7:45 a.m. We were back at BTR by 10:30! The boys had COMPLETED 30 MILES!!!!!! Jody and I made camp at the Alpine campsite (the one closest to the showers!) and the boys put their gear in the Amphitheater. Now it was service project time. Ranger Dan asked that we repair a fence line which was intended to keep the mountain goats away from a small tree orchard. The Scouts learned how to pound T post into the hard west Texas ground. This was a tough service project that our Scouts took on and completed it with flying colors. The Host Troop, Troop 34, invited us to have Thanksgiving lunch with them. They had turkey, dressing, potatoes, green beans, pies, cakes, etc. We ate like a pack of ravenous wolves. We decided that we would share our steaks with

them at dinner. The boys spent the rest of the afternoon playing around the BTSR Headquarters. Around 5:30 p.m., with all of us showered and in clean clothes (well, some of us had clean clothes), we went to the dining hall. We sat outside with the group from Troop 34, cooked steaks, played cards and shared stories. When the food was ready we sat down to a meal fit for kings. After dinner, Troop 34 refused to let us wash dishes, in fact they made us all chocolate shakes. We went back to our camps and settled in for the night.

Friday morning we got up, broke camp and headed into Balmorhea for a burrito breakfast. The rest of the trip was a long 10 hour drive home.

In keeping with long distance hiking tradition each one of the boys, through an action or event, earned a "trail name". Here are the HA group trail names:

"The Nuge" – Alex Berno (named after the song Cat Scratch Fever by Ted Nugent, because the catclaw thorns tore him up)

"IQ" – James Wright (short for The Inquisitor because he was constantly asking questions)

"Duct Man" – James MacLean (his uses for duct tape are mind boggling)

"Bounder" – Chase Williford (short for Bounder of Adventure, because he was constantly ready to scale the rocks or plunge into the brush)

"TB" – Renny Hall (short for Trail Blazer, because he led us down the trails for most of the trip, even when there weren't trails)

I know this letter is long, but bear with me. Jody and I watched these 5 boys traverse some very difficult terrain, overcome problems, pull together as a team, build confidence and see sights that very few people see. The boys will probably tell you that I rode them pretty hard about things, and I did. The fact that we had no injuries or mishaps is because I and Jody stayed on them about safety, cleanliness and skills and attitude. I guarantee they will one day understand why Jody and I did what we did.

Bottom line: Jody and I could not be prouder of a bunch of young men. I would gladly go hiking (and undoubtedly will) with these scouts again. You should be proud of them too, they deserve it!

Douglas A. Williford