

Rainey Mountain Scout Reservation – June 29 to July 10, 2005

Wednesday June 29

The trip out was uneventful. Chris said that traffic conditions were good, with just a few light showers along the way. They stopped in Baton Rouge, LA for a nutritious lunch at Jack in the Box (hey, you can't say we didn't warn you it would be fast food along the way). After continuing on to Hattiesburg, Miss., they stopped to get a boost at the local Starbucks. The caravan reached Meridian at around 5:30. The boys are sacking out in the gym/youth center area of the Poplar Springs Baptist Church. Troop 40 is hosting them. Keith Clifford is the Scoutmaster. He did invite everyone to dinner, but the boys opted for pizza instead. They did, however, have to figure out how to calculate individual costs and tips from the total meal cost which was provided per table.

Tomorrow will probably be a repeat of today. They will leave reasonably early and drive about 4 hours to get to Atlanta, GA. Allow some time for lunch, then an hour to get through Atlanta, and finally another two hours should see them at Andy's Trout Farm around 4:00 or so. Cell phone coverage there will be spotty, so no guarantees on when the next report will come out.

Thursday June 30

Well, so much for uneventful traveling. And yes, as those of you who have gotten excited phone calls already know, everyone is fine, and no, it was not in a "bad" part of town. All that said, the morning's main event was an unanticipated refresher course in firearm safety. As in always point the barrel in a safe direction, keep your finger off the trigger and keep it unloaded. Everyone was loaded up ready to head out after a breakfast at Mickey D's when they all heard what sounded like a gunshot. Turns out it really was. A not-too-bright guy sitting in a nearby truck had just violated all three of the above rules showing off his gun to his buddy, and ended up shooting himself in the leg. Needless to say, those two quickly drove out of the parking lot, no doubt headed for the nearest ER.

I would like to say that was the only Murphy strike, but unfortunately for the troop trailer that was not the case. A tire blew out near Atlanta, which in turn caused enough damage such that the fender fell off and got flattened. Chris has had me do several web searches for trailer repair places near Andy's Trout Farm. Since states are a lot smaller in that neck of the woods, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee are all just as close as Atlanta, Georgia to where they are.

After they made their way to cabins 1-4 where they are staying, they ended up deciding on Mexican food for dinner. Yes. In Georgia. The main event for the boys tomorrow is the Panther Creek Trail hike. Chris of course will be occupied trying to get the trailer repaired. For those of you interested in what the cabins look like, the web site is <http://andystroufarm.com/>.

Friday July 1

Well, once again Troop 957 managed to bring on the rain clouds. Of course in the Appalachians that isn't all that difficult. Still. The boys had started their 6 mile Panther Creek Falls hike with the High Adventure scouts leading the others and the adults trailing behind. According to Jody, it was absolutely gorgeous weather and scenery, with huge trees and crystal clear waters. They got about 2 miles into it and things started to cloud up. The HAers led the rest of the scouts to the falls which form the midway point of the hike, with the adults still trailing behind. Once there they quickly realized that with the increasing winds and rain, which were apparently bad enough to cause nearby trees to crack and fall and the creek water to start rising, staying and resting on their laurels was not an option. So after donning their rain gear, with the HAers again leading the way, they headed back. By this point there were more than just the scouts following behind them. This is a popular trail and others had made the early morning trek, including a shivering little 4 year old who soon got the benefit of Chase W.'s jacket. Needless to say, they got back triumphant to the cabins, where the traditional drowned rat pictures were taken to show at the next COH.

Chris was busy while all of this was going on navigating the confusing Georgia back highways to find the trailer repair place. Two hundred dollars later, the troop trailer now has two new tires and a fender so that it is again legal to drive. Additional work to the lights will have to be done once they get back though.

The boys spent the afternoon resting and then decided to go eat dinner at the same Greek place that they ate at yesterday--Mountain Man Bar and Grill. Apparently last night when the management of the Mexican place they had planned to eat at saw 24 or so hungry scouts and leaders heading up their steps close to closing, they quickly ran to the door and locked it! Meanwhile the Greek place was not about to turn away that many paying customers. I am sure they were equally happy to see them tonight!

Saturday July 2

Today's water adventure, the Nantahala River trip was a complete, if cold, success. The water temperature was a brisk 47 degrees, so those boys who had opted to not go with the wet suits definitely regretted it. The rain towards the end of the trip, however was considerably warmer. Lunch was fried chicken, macaroni and cheese and biscuits. The rest of the afternoon was supposed to be lazy, although Chris said the leaders might go into town for a laundry run. No, not to wash things, that's what the Boy Scout washing machine is for, but to dry them. What with all the rain and the excessive humidity things are just not drying. The light bulb has gone off and those boys who hadn't experienced it before now realize why they were told to bring plastic bags. The Smoky Mountains are called that for a reason, and comments about similarities to the settings used in "Gorillas in the Mist" and "Jurassic Park" are starting to be made.

Since tonight is the last night at Andy's Trout Farm, the leaders have decided to be nice to the boys and let them sleep in--all the way to 7:30, instead of 6:00 am. They should check in at Rainey Mt. at 1:00 pm tomorrow.

Sunday July 3

Last night's dinner turned out to be fish... lots of fish. Ten of the boys decided to take up the Andy's Trout Farm challenge and managed to bag 20 trout at \$3.50 a pound. No catch and release here; you catch it, you clean it, you cook it and you eat it. Needless to say some of the boys were not as happy at this prospect as others. I mean, what are you supposed to do with the hook, and who knew the inside of a fish looked like that! And then the adults went into town and brought back pizza for the non-fishers... However everyone left this morning well fed. They found a cafe serving a breakfast buffet that, just like the Greek place, was absolutely thrilled to have 25 paying customers walk in their door. The plan after this was to leave at around 1:00 and go eat lunch, and then on to Rainey Mt. in the, you guessed it, heavy rain.

For those of you planning ahead to next year, the leaders have been warned off from Sid Richardson (near Mineral Wells) from people who have been there. It sounds like it may be time for a replan.

Monday July 4

The Rainey Mt. camp has officially begun! There was some of the standard pre-camp confusion, including some minor schedule changes. Also, those of the boys who hadn't done their swim checks before leaving managed to miss them again yesterday, and so are having to do them today. It turns out that the sailing classes are held an hour away from Rainey at the Lake Lanier Scout Aquatics Post, so Evan, Travis and James will not be staying with the rest of the boys at the Sartain site. They'll come back Friday. As part of the required pre-coordination, Chase had a Senior Patrol meeting to attend, while Chris and Danny had a marathon two hour Scoutmasters meeting last night. As a result it was past 11:00 before everyone at least tried to go to sleep. Within an hour the rains began again and lasted several hours. It was reasonably sunny this morning, but was starting to cloud up again when Chris called. They do have the tarps out and have done some minor tent repairs. Isn't duct tape wonderful!

As far as activities are concerned, Alex is working on a gateway for the troop site in woodworking, Taylor and David are finding out what it is like to haul golf clubs up and down the Appalachian hills going to and from golf class, and several of the boys are working on their hiking staffs. Straight lengths of lumber abound out there. Chris meanwhile is scouting for Ford repair places as the Excursion developed a radiator leak during lunch yesterday. There are also the expected few cases of homesickness, but as this troop has discovered over the past few years of summer camps, the sure fire cure for that is to keep them fully engaged in all the activities. Before they know it, they are having too much fun to be homesick.

Tonight's July 4th celebration will of course include fireworks. Rainey has a registered pyrotechnician on staff. The sound effects will also be impressive. The Revolutionary War reenactment group, complete with a 3 lb. cannon, and the 8 lb. cannon salute at the lowering of the colors yesterday produce significant echoes when fired in the valley where they all are. Topping off the evening will be Boy Scout hand-cranked ice cream and brownies. The fact that this might lead to carb-induced sleepiness and a reasonable sack time is of course totally coincidental!

And one last warning from the Scoutmaster. Georgia clay is red. Expect to see a lot of red returning with your sons. Those of you who survived the post-BTSR laundry last summer will understand exactly what he means. Plan accordingly.

Tuesday July 5

Another eventful day, for Chris at least. The radiator leak in the Excursion turned out to be a broken water pump, so he got to take the only taxi in all of Rabun County to work repair logistics on both the truck--and his tooth. He managed to have an onlay fall off last night while eating one of the brownies he made during the fireworks show. Of course I can't say too much because the exact same thing happened to me at the last COH, which happened to be both our 25th anniversary and the night right before an out-of-state business trip. Must be something about Boy Scout events and brownies...

The boys are all doing fine. D.A. is building up his biceps as his small boat sailing class turned into small boat paddling when the wind died down. Craig is now a junior medic working with the camp medic. Renny has been busy collecting leaves for forestry, while Justin, Patrick, Robert and Drew have their observation spots picked out for environmental science surveys. Julian and Chase P. are both ready for their next rank BORs.

As far as the weather is concerned, yes it has continued to rain off and on. The leaders are watching the two tropical storms in the gulf closely with an eye to road conditions on the way home.

Wednesday July 6

Today's account is courtesy of our roving reporters (excuse me, assistant scoutmasters) Danny and Mark:

Mark Rehak and I just left the Scoutland outpost camp on Lake Lanier, about 1 1/2 hour drive from Rainey Mountain, just outside Gainesville, Georgia. James is on a canoe trek where he does a different whitewater river each day. Mostly class 2 and 3 rapids although they had to portage around a class 5 once. Evan and Travis are sailing and will spend tonight on a sailboat. Evan won a contest yesterday even though he was the last boat off the starting line. The instructor said no one had ever won after being last to start. These Georgians are learning to not mess with Texas!

The Lake Lanier scouts all watched a big July 4 celebration from a pontoon boat on the lake, and they are having a great time at the outpost camp. Brentley and Alex will spend tonight in a "debris" hut that they built in the woods from twigs and leaves as part of their wilderness survival course. Doug Williford made it to camp around midnight last night. He and Jody were very surprised by the decorating of their hilltop tent, complete with

flowers, sparkling grape juice and a candle, that the other scoutmasters provided while Jody was at the Atlanta airport to pick him up. Our newly discovered talent, Robert, has written some excellent narratives of camp observations that the scoutmasters are enjoying reading.

According to Chris at Rainey, the kayakers, Fletcher included, are having a blast. Dinner last night was steak and chicken, along with baked potatoes and all the fixings. There was also a scout skills competition going on, but the boys opted out. For those of you paying attention to the tracks of Cindy and Dennis, yes they expect to get drenched tonight. Our reputation lives.

Thursday July 7

Everyone can breathe a big sigh of relief--one storm down, one to go. There were huge bands of storms last night from Cindy that together dumped several inches of rain on the camp. Several merit badge classes were either postponed or outright cancelled. This means that it is likely some of the scouts will be bringing home partial merit badges, rather than completed ones. What with the severe weather, most of the wilderness survival crew opted to not stay the night in their handmade shelters. Congratulations to Brentley who toughed it out. Jesse, Garrett and the others taking archery are now fully armed with arrows they made themselves. The adults did take pity on the boys and took a load of sleeping bags etc. to the local laundromat to try and dry out. Rain means mud, and there have been some slips and falls. Expect a larger than normal number of scrapes and bruises! Currently the weather is severe clear, everything having blown through, and is expected to stay that way through Sunday. In fact the temperature tonight is expected to be a balmy 63 degrees.

Today's dinner was Georgia-style barbecued pork chops, chicken fingers, hominy, mash potatoes, green beans, rolls, apple cobbler--and when they ran out of that they brought out the blackberry cobbler! The leaders are getting good at finding places willing to stay open for large groups of hungry campers.

And now for the storm to come. As those of you checking the weather sites know, Dennis is now a Category 3 hurricane with 130 mph winds, and it is expected to reach Category 4 by the time it hits Cuba. After that it will probably regress to Category 3. Expected landfall in NW Florida is Sunday afternoon. If I lived there or in coastal Alabama, I would have evacuation on my mind about now. The Scoutmasters are paying close attention to the storm track and are well into contingency planning to avoid both the storm and the evacuation traffic which will result from it. This planning will continue throughout the day tomorrow as the track is updated. Some things are known. Because the boys from the aquatics camp will not be back with the troop until 9:00 pm tomorrow, leaving tomorrow night is not an option. They will however force the boys to pack as much as they can so as to leave at first light, which is earlier than originally planned. Danny has got the CLCoC folks working on arrangements to stay in a church in Monroe, LA if it turns out they either can't get to or choose not to go to the one in Meridian. The intent would be to leave earlier, swing a lot farther north and drive for longer periods than originally planned. There is in fact a theoretical possibility that they might actually drive straight through and make it back very late Saturday. I will send out a note late tomorrow, and depending on what they decide to do, one or more Saturday. Once they get within a few hours of Houston, the cell phone tree will start.

Bottom line, remember the Boy Scout Leaders Motto--Semper Gumby.

Friday July 8

First let's start off with the corrections. I was politely told by the Scoutmasters that no classes were cancelled because of the weather, only certain activities. However you could have fooled some of the boys as, word has it, several of them showed a much greater interest in what was going on inside the Trading Post than in their classes. In other words if some of them come home with incomplete merit badges, it may not be because of the weather.

Last night the scouts were letting off steam and the adults voted Garrett as the best "head banger" or rock star imitator in the group. Tonight, having finished the merit badge work, they are all watching the final campfire. During the day today, the adults continued their patronage of the local laundromat. They got each of the boys to bring them a change of clothes so they could wash them (and thus protect the inside of their cars). I believe that this time the boys listened, unlike the day before when a couple had to sleep with wet sleeping bags because they weren't paying attention when the call went out to turn them in for drying. As a lesson learned from all of this, in the future the intent is to have the boys bring a separate change of clothes in a sealed bag so they can have a clean set to come home in. Also, for future reference, boys in the wild do not just go through one set of clothes each day. They change every time they get wet/muddy. Most of the boys were totally out of clean, dry clothes by Wednesday.

And now for the Dennis impacts. They are still planning on leaving at first light, which will probably mean they will actually be off the campgrounds by 8:00 am. From there the route taken will be Atlanta, GA to Meridian to Monroe, LA. They will not be staying in Meridian as the Poplar Springs Baptist Church has been turned into an evacuation center. Susan Wright has made arrangements with a Church of Christ in Monroe. Best guess is they should be there by 7:00 pm. Again leaving at first light, they will be taking I20 until it hits 59 and will come in from the north of town. This is intentional to avoid the evacuation traffic on I10. Chris will be calling me every few hours with reports, and to get the latest Dennis track information so they can continue to avoid the associated traffic. Unless something changes, they should still be coming in Sunday, but maybe a bit earlier than planned previously. Remember that before the boys can be released to you, they have to stow all the gear. They will be tired and cranky and will not want to do this. However, they also will be dirty and smelly (no shower facilities in the Monroe church), so you might as well postpone having to drive home with them in an enclosed space by making them do it anyway! And then when you get them home, hose them down before you let them in the house...

Saturday July 9

Update #1

First light turned out to be 8:30 am EDT, since they just had to wait for 30 minutes to get the dunkin' stix from camp... I called Chris about 5 minutes ago with the 8am NWS hurricane track update and they were 25 mi. north of Atlanta, starting to get into some minor city traffic. The regional radar shows severe clear for the route they will be driving on so far. I will call him about every 3 hours or so as the track is updated.

Update #2

As of a few minutes ago, they are about 70 miles from Birmingham, AL where they plan on stopping for lunch. They are well north of the evacuation traffic. So far the weather continues good. The forecast for Monroe, LA does show a 40% chance of thunderstorms, although it is currently clear. I have a call into Susan Wright for the name of the

church they will be staying at tonight. I will send it out in my next status later this afternoon.

Update #3

Currently they are at Meridian, MS, still going on I20. They ended up eating at a Burger King in Tuscaloosa, when the Cracker Barrel in Birmingham was full and they couldn't find one in Tuscaloosa. Per Chris, as an illustration of why the leaders tell you to label everything before going to summer camp, they are carrying enough lost and found items to outfit 1 scout. This includes the two sleeping bags and one uniform left by the Taggarts. They'll save them for you, Dale!

Weather radar shows a lot of ground clutter around Jackson and then scattered storms between Jackson and Monroe. They are also starting to see a lot of signs related to the hurricane evacuation. Since they just fueled up, the next stop should be Monroe.

Sunday July 10

Looks like they are on track to making the church at about 2:30. Allow an hour for unpacking, sorting and cleanup and you can have them back at 3:30. They ate breakfast at Shoney's, and will be stopping within the next hour or so for lunch. Several of you will want to discuss appropriate money management skills with your sons, as in if you want to be able to eat, you have to have not spent all your money on fun stuff. And speaking of fun, they managed to see 3 of the 4 towns named in a Tex Ritter song--Tenaha, Timpson, Bobo (but not Blair). Yes my spelling is probably off on some of these.

Currently they are near Nacogdoches on 59. Weather and traffic have been good, however they have seen a fair number of utility and disaster relief type vehicles headed towards Florida and Dennis recovery ops on I20. They are currently split in two groups about 12 miles apart, since Mark and Danny decided to take the scenic route. Danny has already begun spraying Lysol in his car to see if that will help with the smell. Chris is about to start. Think about what the combination of mud and clothes that have stayed wet for a week straight will do, and then add in the fact that none of them have had a bath in two days... Chris has already told me to have the laundry baskets waiting outside, because he doesn't want them stinking up the house. They will start the cell phone tree once they reach the north of town.