

HISTORY OF CANYON CAMP

"BEGINNINGS"

CANYON CAMP

The Spirit of Canyon Camp may be weightless and invisible, but it is a powerful force that has moved and motivated many persons for over half a century. It did not come into being overnight. Rather, it grew and became focused over a period of several years. Since then it has developed and its influence has been felt by succeeding generations of campers and leaders.

Camping in the U. S. Grant Area Council started somewhat tentatively, then built up rapidly. In 1926 the Council was in process of formation. David T. Brown, the first Scout Executive, established headquarters in Stockton, Illinois. Troops which existed in Freeport, Galena, Lena, Lanark and elsewhere camped on their own.

Lena Troop 1, as it was known before Council-wide numbering, (later 91), may be taken for an example, since it is the one known to me. In the summer of 1926, the troop, under Scoutmaster William C. Lutz, camped in a grove near a creek on the John Huneke farm two miles south of Lena. In the light of later camping practices, this camp was unusual. A 12' by 14' tent was pitched, army cots and bedding were placed inside and nearby were a fire ring and cooking equipment. The camp remained set up for several weeks and the scouts came and went. A patrol or individual boys would decide to go to camp for a day or two, take their provisions and hike or bike out to the camp. The scoutmaster, Mr. Huneke or Dr. Vickery looked in on them occasionally to see that everything was going all right. I remember one day I rode my bike out to camp and stayed over night as the only camper. I presume others may have done the same. It was not formal, but it was camping, it was planned and set up by the troop, and it was fun.

In 1927, U. S. Grant Area Council was more fully established and agreement was made for U. S. Grant Troops to go to Rockford Camp Rotary, between Cherry Valley and New Milford, for full week periods of camping in Blackhawk Area Council. George Driesbach was Scout Executive and I believe Einar Anderson was

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Camp Director. So far as scouting was concerned it was Camp Amos Horton and honor scouts were given Amos Horton awards. The introduction to full scale Boy Scout camping was impressive to us.

The same arrangement characterized 1928, the year Clayton M. Chatters became Scout Executive of U. S. Grant, moved the headquarters to Freeport, and started a ten-year period of rapid growth:

In 1929, U. S. Grant Council rented the facilities of Beloit Camp Rotary, known as I-Kun-A-Kaht-Si. Clayton Chatters was camp director, William E. Goldenstein, a Lena High School teacher, was waterfront director and Stanley Grimm, Galena, was camp clerk. The U. S. Grant-Chief Shabbona World Jamboree contingent trained there at the same time troops were camping, but as a separate unit.

By 1930, U. S. Grant Area Council had the strength to establish its own camp. With the help of many volunteer leaders Apple River Canyon Camp was set up at the ghost town site of Millville, in Jo Daviess County. Dining tent, cook tent, individual patrol tents and cooking equipment were assembled in Freeport and brought out by truck. Senior staff was the same as in 1929. Boys on the camp junior staff included Stanley Grimm, Paul Watz, Howard Weaver, William Seeman, Lawrence Kaney, Fred Landdeck, and Eugene Vickery.

The site laid immediate claim to one's affection and imagination. The joining of East Branch and West Branch to make Apple River took place continuously in what had been downtown Millville, and now was our dining and program area. The cliffs and rugged hills held charm and challenge. The tree-grown cemetery up the hill near the stage coach road made a poignant connection with the determined yet vulnerable pioneers of the previous century. The sense of place and history was on us, even as we hiked, camped overnight at the site of ancient homes, played baseball or swam.

This was the first camp of our own, even though a number of us were by then experienced campers. Our pride in Apple River Canyon Camp grew with every passing day and every Scouting exploit.

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By the end of the season there was no question about where we wanted to camp next year. Primitive though the spot and temporary the equipment, Apple River Canyon was our place.

For those of us who had been in it from the beginning, 1931 was the year U. S. Grant Council Camping came into its own. We knew the Apple River Canyon Area and we loved it. We lived "upstairs" on top of the Stage Coach Road hill, we ate, swam, and followed most of our program in the valley where the rivers joined and we hiked in all directions. Old foundations knew our footsteps and so did the simple headstones in the woods. One of our favorite spots was where the one remaining log across East Branch showed us where the mill of Millville really was. Hawks, eagles and herons flew over head and cliff swallows lived among us. Whippoorwills punctuated our evening sounds and a multitude of small animals enlivened our days.

The Scouting program flourished. Rank and merit badge requirements provided much of our program, but we had team sports, general swimming and long and short hikes. Tower rock was a temptation William (Bosco Bill) Seeman and I could not resist. We climbed to the top, then scaled down on the river side to the window and crawled through it. In all fairness it should be said camp leadership did not encourage this.

Camp Director was Earle E. Richmond under the supervision of Scout Executive Chatters. Junior Staff included Stanley Grimm, Galena, program; Frederick Landdeck of Boscobel, Wisconsin, clerk; Lawrence Kaney, Freeport, quartermaster; Howard Weaver, Freeport, commissary clerk; Paul Watz, Freeport, Mike officer; and Eugene Vickery, Lena, publicity officer. Bosco Bill Seeman was an all purpose special assignment staff member. Mr Richmond, an attorney with several years of camp leadership experience, was also waterfront director.

Scouts who became acquainted with the camp tended to stay over for additional weeks. Part of the attraction was good camp food prepared by Cook Don Bennett. He was a University of Illinois student and mixed well with the campers. He and I on

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one active evening brought two young skunks back to camp to increase the zoo that already contained a muskrat captured by Bosco. The skunks made their dramatic entrance into camp dangling by the tail from outstretched hands of the two captors each of whom was riding a running board of the Chatters family car. Zoo residence was temporary for all the small animals who lived there from time to time.

Heavy rains and local floods provided some risk, a lot of work and much mess, but they also stimulated comradeship and esprit de corps. We had all been through something exciting together. The honor camper fraternity of Nu Gamma Lambda was established by Howard Weaver, Paul Watz and Eugene Vickery. The idea was probably Weaver's. I supplied the name and Paul gave enthusiastic support. We had never heard of the Order of the Arrow, but NGL served us very well as a vehicle for recognition and initiation.

A highlight of the year was the visit of Paul Siple, 22, who at 19 had represented the Boy Scouts of America as an aide to Admiral Byrd on an antarctic expedition. About 300 people came to camp to hear him and to see the Court of Honor at which he presented seven Eagle Scout Awards.

At the end of camp Mr. Chatters took the junior staff to Moline, Illinois, for a visit to Camp Mansur. That was a beautiful, modern, fully equipped permanent camp with swimming pool, cabins and all modern conveniences. We were impressed but had no desire to trade our close-to-nature camp for theirs. According to the write-up in their camp newspaper they were greatly impressed by the rough-and-ready "real scouts" from Apple River Canyon country. We demonstrated knife, ax, and other skills and told them some good tall tales about our rugged life.

During the camp season we had been distressed to learn that the state of Illinois had bought the Millville site in order to establish Apple River Canyon State Park. The idea was to preserve it as a recreational site and also as an area of

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considerable scientific interest. Since it escaped glaciation, it offered a number of geological and botanical features worthy of study.

Our reaction to the loss of our camp site was a great determination to stay in the region if we possibly could. Staff and campers who had been exposed for any length of time to the charm and fascination of Apple River Canyon Camp and to the type of program it provided developed a spirit of loyalty that could not be denied. To perpetuate that spirit and loyalty we were determined to find in the canyon area another place we could call our own. After all but five of staff and campers had left, tents were ready to be returned to Freeport for storage, and tables and benches were stored in a nearby barn, Mr. Chatters proposed that we five take an exploratory hike. Our objective was to find a new location for our camp.

There was no lack of sites in the U. S. Grant Area. The hills of Galena, Hanover and Mt. Carroll, the area north of Lena which later became LeAquaNa State Park and certain Wisconsin places immediately came to mind. But no matter what other acceptable spots we considered, our enthusiasm lay in the canyon. Following Clayton Chatters, Fred Landdeck, William Seeman, Paul Watz and Eugene Vickery started down stream examining every bit of valley, cliffs and hills for suitability for camping and program. Toward evening we reached Coon Creek, a tributary from the north.

When we walked along the east bank of Coon Creek we came upon the well-worn trace of the old stage coach road we had liked at Millville. Over the first hilly entrance to the valley we found a relatively flat space that would accommodate a headquarters, dining and program area. It even held two small mounds which we surmised were of Indian origin. The creek was picturesque and four-seasonal. There was a narrow dirt road, so accessibility was assured. There was a high cliff-like western wall and the canyon cliffs of Apple River were not far away.

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It seemed like a great site and we bedded down with feelings of considerable excitement. We did not know what the next two days would bring, but we were happy to have found such a promising place at the end of the first day.

On the second day we returned to the Apple River valley and hiked downstream to the next tributary, Hell's Branch, now famous as the source of Apple Canyon Lake. We decided the canyon had pretty well ended and that we should follow the branch northward toward Scales Mound. This we did, spent the night on a farm near Scales Mound and on the third day hiked cross-country back to Millville. It was all beautiful country, but the Coon Creek valley was the one that appealed to us the most.

Next year Mr. Chatters rented for the Council the Coon Creek site and he, Paul Watz and Eugene Vickery returned to help establish Canyon Camp in its new location. The spirit that had characterized Apple River Canyon Camp found the new home to its liking and it has grown stronger ever since.

The 1932 camp made use of our same canvas tents, cooking and quartermaster equipment. As usual for camp, staff came early to put things in order. Stanley Grimm was in charge of moving tables and benches from the barn near Millville to Coon Creek. He loaded them on a horse drawn hay wagon and drove over primitive dirt roads that frequently shook off a bench. Re-loading, he persisted and finally brought the essential items into camp.

The staff made a valiant effort to dam Coon Creek using logs and dirt, in and out of sacks. A horse-powered and man-handled scoop helped some and also provided ~~some~~ exciting moments. The goal was to raise the creek level about three feet to make a small lake for swimming and canoeing. The dam leaked; so we used Apple River for swimming and the small enlargement of Coon Creek known as the "bath tub" for occasional plunges.

A Model T Ford sedan was added to help bring in groceries, milk and water. As the first official driver, it was my privilege to cope with loss of its reverse capability, brake,

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dry crankcase and various other idiosyncrasies. Paul Watz was co-pilot of the tin lizzie and it really did perform well after repairs. Stanley Grimm of Galena, later a professional scouter, was assistant to Mr. Chatters in directing the camp. It was a successful season with thirty to fifty campers present each of the four weeks.

Tents for campers were lined up along the east side of the generous open or "parade ground" with their backs to a barbed wire fence along which ran a rural telephone line. Our telephone, in the Trading Post and First Aid tent, was spliced to the line and then grounded. It was powered by a hand generator and was part of an old-fashioned country party line. It seemed fine to us because we had previously not had a phone in camp.

Until 1936, when a well was drilled, all drinking water was hauled to camp. The cook had separate milk cans of water and campers drew drinking water from a faucet at the lower end of a hot water tank that was filled at the top through a funnel. Sometimes the water was chlorinated.

In 1933, Council camping was held at a place between Lancaster and Cassville in Wisconsin. After a week, tents and equipment were moved back to Coon Creek. The rest of the season was held there under the jurisdiction of Clayton Chatters and Stanley Grimm.

One new feature of the 1934 season was the Pioneer Camp. Just east and north of the dining and cook tents, near Coon Creek, 8 to 12 older scouts of First Class or higher rank each week pitched their pup tents for close to nature experience separate from the main camp. They slept in their bed rolls on the ground and their program consisted of a generous amount of pioneering, camping, nature study (trees, birds, animals), hiking and swimming. They usually met with other campers at meal times and often for general games. It was my privilege to be Chief Pioneer. The Chatters and Grimm team presided.

In 1935, Council camping was done at Fish Lake near Lodi, Wisconsin. Stanley Grimm was program director and associate

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camp director, with Mr. Chatters in charge.

In 1936 the Robert F. Koenig's of Freeport purchased 150 acres, including Coon Creek valley, and presented it to U. S. Grant Area Council. This generous gift was donated in honor of Freeman Wittenmeyer, a veteran and respected scoutmaster of Freeport.

The 1936 camp season was a joyous one for us. Clayton Chatters again was director, Eugene Vickery was associate director, and we had the fundamental assurance that we had a permanent camp home. On July 12, in record-setting 110° heat, we dedicated the camp.

The ceremonies started with flag allegiance and group singing, then a court of honor. Eugene Vickery presided; Paul Siple presented the awards, which included an Eagle to Phil Fawver of Freeport. Mr. V. F. Fishburn of Freeport, chairman of the camping committee then spoke. He was followed by Dr. Paul Siple, Antarctic biologist and explorer, who gave the main address. He dedicated the camp to the principles of Scouting and for the use of boys in the Scout camping program.

From that day on, Canyon Camp has grown in stature, equipment and usefulness. It has inspired the services of literally countless volunteer and professional leaders and builders. The devotion of dedicated people has made it possible for Canyon Camp to grow to 250 acres in size, to year-round utilization and to occupy enormous space in the hearts of all associated with it.

Eugene L. Vickery, M.D.