

## **T410 Mystery Campout Report**

Jim Rankin/ASM

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The Mystery Campout was pretty much a mystery to the scouts for what the activity was up to the prior Tuesday and exact location until the Friday gathering at church.

The Troop Scout Leadership at last summer's TOW (Troop Organizational Workshop) had punted on selecting a May campout and instead challenged the Adult Leadership to make it a Mystery Campout. (What could be easier?) The Adult Leaders delivered Big Time.

Mr. Clark, Mr. Hagood, et al. cooked up the idea of a simulated Northern Tier (Minnesota/Canada Boundary Waters) High Adventure canoe trek to spark the scout's interest in the Summer 2009 or 2010 High Adventure (Forward thinking troop?). Mr. Rankin cooked up the location as the Colorado River at the top end of Lake Travis near Spicewood utilizing three established and well-maintained LCRA Recreation Areas: The Narrows RA, Grelle RA, and Muleshoe Bend RA. The Big Guy upstairs cooked up the perfect crisp, clear mornings and glassy water and Nature's Surprises.

At the church, all scouts either had a dry bag, or were issued a thick-skinned trash bag to stash their minimal gear/clothes. Then everyone picked their Food Buddy, and went through the food line to get their "just add boiling water" food for the weekend that was bagged in portions for pairs. Thanks to Mr. McClure for shopping for the whole troop and bagging all items. (HEB is looking for a few good men.)

So it was Friday night camping at The Narrows RA. We had 27 scouts and 13 adults show up, so we looked like the Texas Guard on the way to be Weekend Warriors. Thanks to Mr. Pitts and Dr. Schmidt for putting in hours before & after the trip, to get us the two big BSA trailers with 8 canoes each. As it took only 1 hour of driving, we were thrilled to get there with plenty of daylight to scout out the recreation area and erect tents and still play around. The bright moon, just 2 days prior to being full, provided all the light we needed after sundown. Saturday morning was classic: cloudless, cool, and crisp. Mr. Arnold (T410's Mr. Coffee) was with us again and had his cattle-drive-sized, stainless steel coffee pot perking with Starbuck's best before any others arose. It is so pleasant to have Mr. Arnold or your Food Buddy pouring you that first cup of Joe, followed by the perennial morning conversations, "How'd you sleep?" "Wasn't that moon just the bee's knees? Did J\_\_ C\_\_\_'s snoring wake you up too?" (No names here.) Everyone packed up their tents before they could boil water and enjoy their oatmeal-in-its-own-bag High Adventure breakfast with a granola bar and a trail mix snack to put in your pocket for later.

Quickly now, pick your Canoeing Buddy (with some help from Leadership to make sure each canoe had at least one engine), get all the gear/clothes into waterproof bags, tie the bags into the canoes, distribute the map, spread out the Canoe Wranglers lead/center/tail dragger, and we are off at 9am. 6-1/2 miles to go until we reach Grelle RA with a lunch stop where we find a decent place to pull up. A fancy ski boat launched just before us. Thoughts of big wakes swamping canoes went through the Leaders heads. We were pleasantly surprised and entertained when they kept their distance and instead gave us a barefoot skiing show worthy of Six Flags.

Then, an hour into the trip, our first Big Nature Surprise. We started hearing & seeing lots of splashing near the grassy sloping shoreline. Upon paddling closer, we could spy the dorsal and tail fins of very large fish causing this commotion. We could get really close and they still didn't spook. A thought hit scout Zane R. (known as Fishboy at the house for his entertaining aquarium). Like a lightning bolt, he was out, racing through the shallows and trying to herd or catch the fish. Within a minute, he was holding up a 20" carp. Then he got squirted by it. Urine? Poop? No, it was eggs, (caviar to those Survivor Wannabees). This mystery was solved. Carp were spawning in the grassy shallows. They wiggle and fin to make a depression, and then they squirt the eggs & sperm into it. If Mr. Kleinsasser (T410's own TPWD Fish Biologist) had been with us, we would have learned much more. Our own Birds & Bees lecture, scout-style. Several other scouts got their chance to catch & release while we had our snack stop.

It took a while for all the canoes to reach this spot and some Canoe Buddies were swapped for the good of the troop. Dr. Schmidt was paired with "Capt. Leadbottom" Taylor as the tail dragger canoe. The Capt lived up to his name and they had no trouble staying at the rear and cracking that (imaginary) whip.

HEAD Em Up, Move Em Out. Onward downriver on such a glassy surface. Mr. Rankin was lead canoe with an ever-changing partner but always had to push to stay ahead of several older scouts. It is all private land we were passing. A suburban was parked on a nice grassy area. We asked if we could stop for lunch and knowing that scouts Leave No Trace, they were most gracious to allow us to pull in to that Community's Park. They remarked how good it was to see scouts experiencing the river. PBJ and fruit and Kool Aid for lunch among the Turkey vultures, turtle, lizards, and snake. A welcome shot of energy to carry us the rest of the way.

Just past noon and we are back on the water following the map.

There is not any noticeable current. Grelle RA is in a winding inlet that hides the camping areas from view. Mr. Pitts and Mr. Westphal had agreed to drive to Grelle RA Saturday Morning to reserve a spot for T410, and it was a beauty. Lots of grassy shoreline for the canoes to beach with wide-open slightly sloping grass up to the tree line. Places for beached canoes (that rest in the overturned position overnight), places for tents, places for playing games that the scouts would invent.

My Lead canoe with Scout Cooper H. hit the shore at 1pm. 4 hours on the river including the lunch stop, averaging 2-1/4 miles/hour. Adults usually paddle at 3 miles/hour. Mr. Clark had been worried it would take scouts more than 6 hours with untold whining, but the scouts really shined (and will feel new muscles in the morning). As we already had lunch, everyone could start setting up their tents immediately.

Once that was done, Dr. Schmidt, Mr. Hackett, Mr. Westphal, Mr. Rankin, Mr. Clark, and Capt. Leadbottom Taylor gathered the majority of the scouts and started cranking on the balance of the canoeing merit badge requirements that hadn't been completed at the previous Camp Tahuaya campout in deep water: flipping out of a canoe, entering a canoe singlehandedly(toughest), entering a canoe with your buddy in it, swimming a swamped canoe to shore, emptying a swamped canoe(tough), and righting a swamped canoe with help of another canoe(piece of cake).

All scouts were able to complete these requirements (no slackers or shortcuts allowed). It is just a few more requirements that can be done at the church to complete the whole canoeing merit badge for so many.

Many scouts, including the soggy ones, then utilized the Free time (that they had always lamented was in short supply on campouts) for ultimate Frisbee, touch football, etc. Adults had a good discussion on how the troop is doing and what can be done to improve the program (never settling for status quo, always keeping that biggest room in our sights... the room for improvement).

On to our Dinner in a bag that you “Just Add Boiling Water”. Everyone got the same ingredients, but some seemed to enjoy theirs more than others. There was plenty of spare food available for hungry scouts wanting more. P.S. buy freezer-grade zip locks if you’re going to pour boiling water in them as the regular ones get you jumping when they leak. A tranquil evening hour to utilize: playing, fishing, snoring, working on skits, before the campfire without a campfire started at sundown.

Scout Sam H. was our experienced M.C. once again. He did a great show. There were at least two skits that won the coveted “Big-O” award for Originality, a welcome break from the skits we’ve seen since Cub Scout Days - OUR Cub Scout Days. We held the reverent service at the end of campfire, which worked out well with getting us onto the lake that much earlier the next morning.

Sunday Morning – Man, what a beaut again. Cloudless, crisp, with the steam rising from the water and a couple of our fishermen at the shore, casting, casting, casting, to no avail. A quick packing, a quick breakfast of oatmeal & granola bar and it was back to the canoes. The Scouts had this down to a routine now and the canoe loading took half as long with much less needed gear being packed in the bottom of the bag.

We pushed off with Mr. Rankin in the lead canoe again with Scout Kiran in the Seat of Honor. Nature’s Second Surprise raised its head, literally. (As it happened further back, so I can only trust Dr. Schmidt’s and the Captain’s word on this).

Scout Devon and Scout Brian E. had just pushed off from shore when Scout Devon starting shouting “SNAKE, SNAKE”. Scout Brian, having E-prep training under his belt was cool and collected, “Come to the stern, Devon.” Devon, with his recent canoe training had no difficulty standing and “running” to the rear. A short paddle back to shore revealed the 18” black snake, with faint diamond markings on its back but without a viper head, had crawled into the bow during the night and had come out to see what the commotion was. Look for the picture taken once the Captain had captured it and held it upside-down (so it would get really mad?). We’ll all be interested for some scout to identify the species.

1-1/2 hours for the 3 mile paddle left to Muleshoe Bend RA which had the same grassy shoreline and even more carp spawning. As the canoes came in, the adults ran shuttles, and every scout that wanted to attempt catching carp sure had a golden opportunity to catch & release. There may have been some muddy, stinky shoes to clean once they got home.

My many thanks to the shuttling and trailer crew, as the logistics are a tall order for a 10-mile canoe trip on the river. It was a good chuckle when the Aggie Dads heads all turned at the same time as the shuttle car passed the commercial-looking ranch gate that advertised both Country Music & Miniature Donkeys.

As you can tell, a wonderful trip was experienced by all. The only thing that would have made it better is if we had some Moms or other new Dads Committee Members come camp with us to experience these memorable times. I know of 1 or 2 that have been thinking about it but keep waiting for a Critical Mass to occur. I can assure you Moms,

there is no off-color language or discussion topics going on and you will know your son's behaviors and ever-growing character that much better.