

T410 TUBING CAMPOUT REPORT 09/22/07

It is so wonderful to experience a trip where everything falls into place as planned, as well as new & better opportunities that sprout up making it even that much richer.

We should call this the Serendipitous Tubing Campout.

One hour prior to meeting at the church, Corps of Engineers called me to say they had not mowed the 3' tall weeds at the arranged campsite. They would give us a different day-use shelter 3.5 miles further along the lake in their Potter Creek Park. When we got there, it was like Scout Heaven: Huge, high roof structure with lighting, 10 picnic benches on concrete slab, multiple BBQ grilles, water spigots at the corners, large level grassy field on one side with a slope down to water on the other, far away from public campsites, large clean lit bathroom a short walk away, and a killer view of Canyon Lake. Because the Corps realizes the importance of Scouting to build young men with leadership skills and character, the camping would be free in exchange for a scout service project. (Serendipity #1)

We arrived there around 8pm in the dark. With the troop pitching tents, Fritz Taylor(ASM) & I slipped away to drive back to New Braunsfels to meet John Spence & Cindy Agee who own the small house & lot immediately adjacent to the Last Public Exit on Comal River, right where we would be exiting the next day.

John & Cindy are T410 parents whose son, Harrison Spence, is a senior at a New York State Boarding School and Eagle Scout Candidate who will be organizing his Eagle project this Oct (look for that announcement requesting scout help and possible fund raising).

They had 25!!!! tubes which we began filling at 10pm with the loaned compressors. Once the tubes were filled, they brought out some rafts to fill and invited Fritz & I to join them floating down the same Comal River portion the scouts would do later RIGHT THEN AT 11:30PM. It was magical in the starry, half-moon lit sky with nocturnal birdcalls, frog croaks, and a 15" plecostomus (bottom feeder) eyeballing our toes.

Talk about pleasant sacrifices for the scouts. (Serendipity #2)

Saturday morning, what a beautiful morning, with a big clear horizon and cloudless sky. Mr. Pitts graciously offered to stay at the camp to protect our belongings from scrupulous thieves, and Mr. Taylor offered to swap for the afternoon shift. Chad Bohls was still in town for a swim competition, so James Clark stepped up to the plate as acting SPL. Breakfast, cleanup, gather tubing personals, and off to the Spence/Agee's house to see the Last River Take-out so no scout would float past it, onto the Guadalupe, and down to the Gulf. I had another pleasant surprise when I got there because my brother, Bill Rankin, MD, who lives in Iowa, was down in San Antonio for a medical conference, and he showed up to float with me & the scouts. We're always thrilled & relieved to have medical doctors join us on Scout campouts. John & Cindy had recommended a different tube rental place than the \$9/tube I had found online that was located a bit out of the way. I visited Corner Tubes which was conveniently right next to our put-in. When the Owner heard it was for the scouts, he cut his price to \$8/Tube and we rented the last 12 tubes we needed to get everyone. John Spence had strapped almost ALL his tubes to his truck (he must be related to Jed Clampett) and drove the 7 blocks up to the put-in. The drivers with all the scouts followed him to the top end. Prince Solms Park & Tube Chute was closed for the season: Big Windfall. That gave us free parking right at the put-in and allowed us to

float thru the dam's tube chute and return for another chute run as many times as we wanted for free. (Serendipity #3)

10:30am at water's edge it was the first of many head counts, and the familiar phrase "Where's Your Buddy?" and "Head 'Em Up and Move 'Em Out". Mr. Hackett stood as Life Guard right at the chute's whitewater (he never had to jump in) and Mr. Arnold, positioned at the last steps at Prince Solms, was pulling out scouts if they had missed the first two sets of stairs due to the current that you couldn't swim against (he was a busy man). When everyone had their fill of the chute, it was counting heads again, the same familiar phrases shouted, and Mr. Arnold out in front, the balance of ASM's scattered throughout, and Mr. Hayes pulling up the rear. Some free-thinking scouts brought water guns and with that endless supply of ammo, they were set. Unfortunately, I was their target way too much of the time, but was able to return some fire with a small water gun. We were nearly the only ones on the river at that time, not much more than a dozen others around us the whole float.

12:30pm at the public's Last River Exit, a head count, and then around the end of the fence to the Spence/Agee's where we had stashed our lunches and dry towels. Harrison Spence is one of those free-thinking scouts. Previously he had cooked up a homemade Slip & Slide with a long piece of construction plastic sheet and a raft at the bank's bottom to cover the few exposed roots. With a garden hose at the top end keeping the slide wet, and the steep grassy slope, scouts were practically flying down that hill and then a big splash into the water. A personal Schlitterbahn Park. Scouts showed all sorts of gyrations and got to slide as many times as they wanted while eating lunch. Serendipity #4)

The Camp sitters drove to swap places and we all headed up to walk the 7 blocks to the top end to do it all again. John Spence did a repeat of his Clampett imitation.

1:30pm gathering at the top end, getting both Bohls' situated with tubes, it was counting heads again, the same familiar phrases shouted, and Mr. Arnold out in front, the balance of ASM's scattered throughout, and Mr. Hayes pulling up the rear. Tube chute time again. Mr. Ryan pulling errant scouts out at the last steps for a while (not as many as scouts were up the learning curve by now). Another good dose on the chute, a gathering at the last steps, another head count and shout, and we were off for the last 2 hour float. The river was quite busy, but not nearly like the stories you hear and news articles that you read. The rowdy behavior, bad language, and public nudity must have been a different weekend (Mr. Pitts was sure keeping an eye out for it). (Serendipity #5)

4pm at the Last Public Exit, a head count, and then around the end of the fence to the Spence/Agee's where we had stashed our dry towels. The drivers caught a shuttle bus to the top parking lot and scouts put up all the tubes and policed the yard. After thanking the Spence/Agee's profusely, we we off to the campsite for a little advancement work and dinner prep.

I heard of a lot of good meals being cooked, but didn't hear of very many Scoutmaster Challenge gourmet meals. Once dishes were all cleaned and the sun set, scouts started the campfire and Ryan Westfall did a superb job as M.C. for the skits. The adult leadership was challenged by scouts to come up with a skit. I won't tell who thought up that stinker of a skit but we did just what Mr. Hackett had told us to do. It might have been too cerebral, so he said. Thankfully, it was over soon after that, and

Mr. Arnold, who had been slaving away over the Dutch ovens this whole time called us back to the shelter for peach cobbler and apple pie (in a Dutch oven).

Next morning was another beaut. Benton Arnold led us in a reverent service and we started around the circle with what we were thankful for. The chute was a biggy, the weather, the Slip & Slide, the Spence/Agee's, the adult leaders for bringing them, the parents for trusting adult leadership enough to send their sons, that everyone came back safe, interesting dragonflies that stayed on your hand while you were floating until their wings were dry enough to take them away, and the friendship of a first year scout for another that helped him so much.

We finished packing troop gear, and then Chad Bohls had the troop picking up trash in a wide area as our service project. This was Chad's first monthly campout as SPL and the troop is able to do so much more, thanks to good scout leadership of him and his ASPL team, James Clark & Rush Hemphill.

We bought a thank you card for the Spence/Agee's, everyone signed it while eating pizza, and it was delivered to their Hyde Park home. If you see them at a scouting event or at Harrison's eagle project, you might express your own thanks for their help. The troop had a most economical, fun, memorable trip. I believe there may be some TOW votes to do this again next year.

Yours in Service,
Jim Rankin, T410 ASM & Floatmeister