

# **A Smart Parent's Guide to Summer Camp**

## **Troop 15, St. Francis United Methodist Church**

(with attribution to Troop 165, Living Savior Lutheran Church)

### Introduction

Getting your son ready for his first week of Summer Camp is a bittersweet, yet nerve wracking experience. For many of us, this is our Son's first experience in a long-term overnight camping setting. It's a little daunting, trying to anticipate what he'll need to make his camp experience happy and memorable. Don't panic. It's easier than you think!

In this guide, I'll try to describe what he'll be experiencing during his first few days at camp. We'll discuss a few of the typical camp maladies that Scouts in our Troop seem to experience every year. Finally, I'll share some clothing and packing tips I've compiled to prepare you for the "Saturday Night Freak-out" we all seem to go through on the night before camp.

I'll give you a word of warning. Summer Camp is a powerful jolt of maturity for our Scouts. They may be a little different when they return. In Adult Leader Training, we're taught that a week of summer camp teaches more personal and leadership skills than 12 months of weekend campouts. I've watched most of my wide-eyed innocents turn into grizzled veterans by the third day of camp.

### A Typical Summer Camp Setup

Your Scout's accommodations for the week will be a Wall Tent; a square canvas structure with a floor area of about 50 square feet. Inside are two cots, either metal frames with a mattress or wooden frames with stretched canvas. The tents also come equipped with a wolf spider or two lurking in the corners. We'll be the second Troop to use these tents this season, so most of the lurking insects will probably have fled in terror or abducted for the ever popular Insect Collection merit badge. If your Scout has a strong fear of bugs, our older Scouts will try to brush any critters out when he moves in. Alternatively your Scout may want to bring their own tent with mosquito netting. The canvas tents can also become stuffy, and many Scouts prefer to use their own tent along with the cot from the tent provided by the camp.

Wall tents are usually arranged in a circle around a picnic table, fire ring and latrine area. We'll install a large tarp over the picnic table, so our Scouts can assemble and socialize in a dry area outside their tents. Our Troop has several large propane lanterns that we use to light this area. During free time in the evening, our Scouts will be playing cards, checkers or chess, working on merit badge homework or just socializing. (We suggest having your Scout bring a spiral notebook or at least some lined paper in order to take notes during merit badge sessions and to do homework.)

Most of our Scouts and leaders pack "camping chairs", like the blue Harris Teeter give-away from 2001 that you see at every YMCA soccer game. These will be arranged around the fire ring and filled with half-asleep Scouts by 9:00 PM. Those who forget to bring chairs usually spend the week arguing with the chair's owner over "squatters rights" so it's a good idea to clearly mark your family name on your chair.

The latrine area consists of pit or chemical toilets. A long trench sink with running water for washing hands and brushing teeth is also provided. These sinks seldom have an area that allows our Scouts to store their toothbrushes, toothpaste and deodorant during the week, so he'll be bringing them from his tent every morning. We recommend labeling these items with a permanent magic marker (Sharpie) and packaging in a zip lock bag.

A shower area equipped with hot/cold water is usually within a short walk from the campsite. With all the time spent at the waterfront, showers are not usually a priority with our Scouts. Scouts who become truly rank (and a hazard to others) by midweek are strongly encouraged (i.e. prodded) to the shower area. We recommend packing a squeeze bottle of Campsuds (available in the camping section of Wal-Mart) or body scrub to help us with this vital task.

### A Typical Day at Camp

6:30 is reveille for the rest of our Troop. We'll drag everybody out of bed, arrange them in surly groups, and make our way to the flagpole outside the dining hall. Morning assembly usually includes a flag ceremony and 15 minutes of mind-numbing announcements; followed by an orderly procession into the dining hall. Breakfast is usually something high in carbohydrates to give them energy for the day.

Immediately after breakfast, one of our leaders will gather Scouts for a "meds run" to the Camp Health Lodge where they'll receive any morning medications. If needed, we'll do this after lunch and dinner, as well.

Our new Scouts attend the first year Scouting program taught by the camp staff. Scouts who complete this program will usually earn at least two merit badges, swimming and orienteering (navigation with a compass) and receive skills instruction for Second and First Class ranks.

First year programs also surround our new Scouts with boys of their own age and skill ability, which helps them to feel more comfortable and confident with camp life. This approach cuts down on homesickness, too. We usually have an adult leader or two tagging along with our first year group during the day to help the instructors and provide a familiar face.

After lunch in the dining hall, our new Scouts head back to the first year program for another hour or two of work. Then, they're released for the rest of the afternoon. Most make a beeline to the waterfront for swimming or boating. The rest drift back to camp for cards and games or up to the trading post for snacks.

We require all of our Scouts to use the "buddy system" whenever they leave the campsite. Once they indicate they understand this important concept, we usually give them full run of the camp. Any Scouts who abuse this privilege, and miss the evening meal or require a search party get grounded. Thankfully, most of our guys can tell time pretty well, and this is rarely an issue.

Around 6:00, we'll gather everybody at our campsite and march up to the dining hall for the evening assembly and dinner. After dinner, the camp will usually have evening programs several times during the week. Otherwise, our Scouts will take an evening dip in the lake, roam the camp, play cards and board games, or just talk. As an alternative to the high-priced junk food over at the Trading Post, our Troop brings several large plastic containers of snacks that we bring out around 9:00 for a "cracker barrel" snack before bedtime.

Taps is played around 10:00 and we'll start enforcing quiet time within the camp. Our more talkative Scouts are urged to continue their discussions within their tents. There are always a few night owls who jabber past midnight. However, after a few mornings of 6:30 wakeup calls, everybody starts getting on the same sleep schedule.

## Food

Three squares a day, served in a common dining hall. To keep the really fussy eaters from starving during the week, there's usually a cereal bar open for breakfast and a table with "fixings" for PBJ sandwiches at lunch and dinner.

We try to keep our Scouts from eating in their tents, as the inevitable crumbs attract insects (especially ants), raccoons, and skunks. For this reason, we also strongly discourage Scouts from bringing food to camp. Our Scouts do not have the luxury of relocating to another tent if theirs becomes overrun with crawling insects. If it's raining outside, they won't have anywhere to go.

Of course, every camp has a "trading post" stocked with overpriced junk food and ice cream. Your Scout's access to this food source will be limited only by whatever money he brings to camp. Our adult leaders will try to help him make smart choices with his spending money, but we can't forbid him to buy junk food. Usually, making snacks available at our evening "cracker barrel" cuts down on trading post candy consumption.

We counsel our Scouts to limit sugar consumption during the day because sweets tend to kill the thirst reflex. Hydration is a big issue at summer camp. Most camp activity shelters have water coolers, so your son will be able to refill his water bottle every hour. Back at our campsite, we'll maintain large coolers: some filled with ice water and others with Gatorade in the common area at all times and we constantly urge our Scouts to drink, drink, drink.

The large-mouthed "Nalgene" bottles are great for carrying fluids to and from the daily classes. They are relatively inexpensive if purchased at Target or REI. Many of our Scouts pack a few recycled throw-away bottles of commercial drinking water, so they don't have to worry about losing them during the week.

## Medicine

Some summer camps require medicine to be distributed by a "qualified professional" such that medicine is administered by the trained professionals at the Health Lodge.

The exceptions are "immediate use" drugs like Epi-pens and inhalers, which our Scouts can keep on their person. If your son uses an "immediate use" drug like these, please provide a second doser to the Summer Camp Scoutmaster so we'll have a backup if the first one is misplaced.

If your son takes a prescription or non-prescription medicine on a scheduled or as-needed basis, the camp may have forms to fill out with the dosage requirements. Some camps will ask you to fill out a dosage card for every administration during the week, so they can keep track. If the camp utilizes these forms our adult leaders will provide a copy of these forms when you register for camp.

Fill out the forms, make sure you have enough medicine for the week and stick everything in a zip lock baggy with your Scout's name on it. It's a great idea to have everything filled out and bagged before you drop your Scout off on Sunday morning. We usually have a Scouting parent stationed at the drop off to collect forms and medicines so nothing gets misplaced.

### Health Issues (Mental and Otherwise)

**The Rash.** Scouts who swim all afternoon, and let their swimsuits dry on their bodies day after day, usually get this little inconvenience on day three. It usually shows up as a pretty impressive rash, especially if it's been hot and humid. Our more experienced Scouts usually pack a small container of Gold Bond or talcum powder and sprinkle a little in their shorts in the morning to keep cool and dry during the day. Condition usually clears up within 48 hours.

**Wednesday Stomach Ache.** Too little water on Sunday through Tuesday usually shows up as constipation with an accompanying gut ache on Wednesday. A dose of Pepto Bismol or Milk 'o Magnesia from the Health Lodge, and repeated advice from the adult leaders to "drink up", usually cures this malady within a few hours.

**Homesickness.** Even boys who have spent time away from their parents in the care of relatives or friends get a little overwhelmed by the camp experience. Surrounded by large, hairy near-strangers and forced into an unfamiliar routine; it's easy to start longing for home. Over the years we've found that the key is to keep them busy. The first year Scout program is great for preventing homesickness because the Scouts are constantly moving between activities and surrounded by their peers, rather than a bunch of unfamiliar older kids.

A Scout who has to miss a birthday celebration during his week at camp is also prone to homesickness. You can help by offering to postpone his party until after he arrives home. .

While our leaders will carry them for safety reasons while traveling, we do not allow our Scouts to carry cell phones. Additionally, cell phones do not receive reception at Camp Daniel Boone. If one of our Scouts is having a bad case of homesickness, our leaders will usually try to discourage him from using the pay phone to call home. In our experience, hearing a familiar voice only seems to worsen the ache. To help him cope, our leaders and older Scouts will work hard to involve the Scout in some activity and refocus his thoughts.

### Money

We recommend allotting \$25 to \$50 for the week (and \$5 for lunch on the way home). Small bills are preferred. No checks. Please encourage your Scout to ration his money over the course of the week.

Scouts will have additional fees associated with their merit badge classes. We'll make sure you know about these extra charges several weeks before camp.

### Clothing Hints

Be prepared for cooler weather. A cold front, bringing rain to the region, can easily drop daytime temperatures into the 60's and evening temps into the 40's. Camp Daniel Boone is in

the mountains, and temperatures can become unexpectedly cold. Be sure to pack a coat, lightweight waterproof jacket and a fleece pullover; just in case.

As much as we lecture them about it, we still have a few Scouts who pack sandals with open toes (like flip-flops) to camp. Please understand that, due to safety concerns, this footwear is not allowed at any Scouting event. Uncovered feet are magnets for dropped firewood, knives, hot coals, scalding water and poison ivy. Sneakers, athletic shoes, or hiking boots are great for morning and afternoon classes. Most of our Scouts wear the plastic closed-toe clogs, (or Crocs) for trips to the waterfront and showers.

The Class "B" (i.e. the red Troop t-shirt) will be the uniform for most of camp. Three (3) of these should get the average Scout through the week. T-shirts with Scouting themes are also ok. We change into the official Class A uniform (official Scout shirt, Scout belt, Scout socks and olive colored shorts) for evening meals and events during the week.

We recommend packing a coat hanger. Many of our Scouts originally show ignorance and confusion over its use, so Class "A" shirts end up on the tent floor after the first day of camp. By Thursday, shuddering at the prospect of changing into a sand-coated Class "A" shirt, for yet another evening meal, our Scouts usually gain enlightenment. By their second year of camp, you'll see Class "A" shirts hung up in the tents of even our messiest Scouts.

### Packing Hints

**Put identification marks on everything you pack** since his stuff will be intermingled with his tent-mates by the second day. Young Scouts usually end up swapping tents midweek, so gear ends up scattered throughout camp. Use a laundry marker to place his initials on the white tag of every piece of clothing. Mark everything else (especially flashlights and headlamps) with a strategic blob of nail polish. Use a real ugly color, and you'll increase the chances his stuff won't "walk" away. Don't take anything that if lost will cause great sadness.

Some of our Scouts pack a full sized pillow and sleeping bag. It's also a good idea to pack a fitted sheet (twin sized) to cover the cot or mattress, and he can use the z-bag as a comforter. This makes it a lot more comfortable in warm weather, but be sure to include the sleeping bag in case of cold temperatures.

The Scout should pack their clothes, not Mom or Dad, as this is an important part of a Scout's learning. The parent should act as quality control and let the Scout take responsibility for gathering, assembling, and showing you what they have done. Consider having your Scout pack each day's clothing in a large (e.g. 2 gallon) zip lock bag. If the pack or loose clothes fall off the tent platform and end up outside and it rains your Scout could be very uncomfortable. The bags have the additional benefit of separating the clean clothing from the dirty.

Consider using an 18 gallon sized plastic Rubbermaid container as a packing container, rather than using a duffle bag. Besides being easier for us to pack in the Troop trailer, a container of this size can be slid under the cot or used as a nightstand.

A small backpack (about ¾ the size of his book bag for school) is great for carrying water, handouts, raingear and captured critters to and from class during the day.

## Hygiene

Your boy will spend some time in the lake and will likely not have a desire to bathe. However by mid-week some children may have obtained the rank (odor, that is) that is something akin to a Billy-goat. Please send along some squeezable camp soap (or bar soap and shampoo) so that they can wash themselves when we urge them to the showers. Please mark toothbrush, deodorant, and toothpaste with identifying marks.

## Miscellaneous

Bring bug repellent (you want to stay away from away from the aerosol sprays both for environmental reasons and because some people seeking to be Darwin Award winners turn these into flame throwers), a cup, and camp chair all marked with identifying marks. Send your Scout with effective sunscreen as your Scout will be out of doors almost the entire day each day.

## Phone Calls & Mail Call:

Mail can be sent to your Scout at Camp Daniel Boone. None of us want to be the parent of a Scout who does not have their name called at Mail Call. Scouts love to get a letter and treat in the mail. I suggest that we each plan on sending two mailings: one on Fri, Jun 12, 2009 and the second on Mon, Jun 15, 2009. Letters are always welcome and one can include a treat (that doesn't melt) like Skittles, Jolly Ranchers, Smarties, etc. If we have a parent going up mid-week maybe we can organize ourselves to send along a group treat such as Oreos, homemade cookies, or Chips Ahoy. If anyone has energy around organizing a mid-week treat please "sing out."

Use the following address for letters and packages to your Scout:

**Scout's Name; Troop 15  
Camp Daniel Boone  
3647 Little East Fork Road  
Canton, NC 28716**

Due to the number of scouts in camp every week, only EMERGENCY calls can be made to camp. In the case of a family emergency, Camp Staff will deliver a message to the scout in an expedient manner. Cell Phones do not receive reception at Camp Daniel Boone. However, Scouts are welcome to use the office phone in case of emergency; otherwise, they will be directed to pay phones. Pay phones accept change and calling cards. Calling cards can be purchases in the trading post.

Camp Daniel Boone  
828-648-0435 (08:30a to 10:00p)  
828-648-6770 (10:00p to 08:30a)

Anyway, that's about it. Enjoy your week off from the demands of parenting. We'll enjoy the company of your Scout(s)! Even better, come and spend an evening with the Troop. On Wednesday night the camp hosts a live band playing good-ole mountain music with a picnic on the lawn. Hot dogs and hamburgers are served outside and parents/family members are invited to camp for a great cookout ,and to enjoy fellowship with their Scouts. Parents are asked to purchase a temporary meal ticket for \$5.00 in the Trading Post.

Adult Leadership Team; Troop 15

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