

# High Adventure Supplement



## Willistown Troop 78

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Summer 2023  
Supplement

### Sea Base!

Islamorada, Florida Keys



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# Florida National High Adventure Sea Base

Islamorada, FL

August 3 - August 9, 2023

By Ethan Winkelman

On a cloudy August morning, 16 scouts and scouters stepped off the Willistown 78 Troop bus and onto the premises of the Philadelphia Airport, prepared to embark on the scuba diving trip of a lifetime.

Dressed in matching maroon Class-B uniform, the blood clot of 78ers received many stares and questions on the way to the plane, while adults tried to not get lost. On the airplane itself excitement (and sleepiness) was in the air during the 3 hour flight to Miami.

But when we touched down everyone was wide awake to experience Florida. First impression: HOT!!! It was a relief to pile into the air conditioned bus that would take us to Florida National High Adventure Sea Base. Going down highway 1 through Key Largo, the alien environment of palm trees and developments spread before us. After all this flying and driving, Sea Base awaited us. Pulling up to the compound, the next few hours had us getting situated, acquiring scuba gear and taking in the facilities (and iguanas).

In the center was a large dormitory space where we would live for the week with amenities on the ground floor like volleyball courts. So of course, we had to play a game to celebrate our arrival. A game that quickly became brutally funny whenever someone would spike the ball in a wild direction or misplay it. For the first night, there was only dinner and an informational presentation that would occur every night. All the meals at Sea Base were delicious and filling, although that opinion was very subjective amongst our group, depending on who you asked.

Next morning was our first diving day. The 16 of us were split into 2 groups, A and B. Each group had a different dive master, who we got familiar with. We started in the pool to review swimming skills and recall how we should use our gear. After the pool we were ready to brave the open ocean. Moving our gear, hauling tanks, all the preparation that was needed was done. Everything was brought to the *BSA Adventure* dive boat, where we got acquainted with Captain Pat. It was a special moment, leaving the harbor and watching





the enormous wake. The bright summer sea sparkled under the harsh sunlight. Scouts made sure to apply generous amounts of sunscreen for protection.

Our first dive was a location called the Pillars of Atlantis. Dramatic! From the surface we could see the “Pillars” underwater, nine rock piles arranged in a bowling pin formation. These piles created an ideal habitat for coral to form. First, divers stepped off the back of the boat one at a time, under the careful watch of our dive masters and Pat. A lengthy rope called the bowline trailed behind the boat, which we grabbed onto so we didn't drift away. The first people in the water were very curious, dipping their

snorkeled heads underwater to get a good first look. And indeed, there were fish! And coral too. As soon as everyone was in the water we were able to get a better look. One thing we noticed quickly was how warm the water was. Uncomfortable to some, the warmth allowed us to focus on the bright and colorful fish swimming around us.

The next couple days repeated this formula, we would visit different dive sites each day, then snorkel on the open ocean. A list of some of the things lucky divers saw: sea turtles, moray eels, barracudas, parrotfish, goliath groupers, lobsters and sharks. That's right, sharks. No great whites though, to the relief of some (most). Populating the reefs abundantly were bottom feeding nurse sharks.

Peaceful to humans, they were like the cute puppies of the sea. We were able to go to the bottom and interact with these sharks during one of the days. They would affectionately swim up to nuzzle under divers, sometimes when they least expected it. The people with cameras made sure to take lots of pictures during that encounter. The crown jewel of Sea Base was the vaunted night dive. Departing just after dinner, we made it to a picturesque lighthouse area called Alligator Reef. Everyone had been issued tank lights and flashlights beforehand, these were turned on as we sank down to the reef proper.



The sun's orange rays receding over our head, we could witness a whole different side to ocean life. At night, the crabs and lobsters came out, and day fish went to sleep. Highlights: an enormous nurse shark estimated at seven feet. an enormous sea turtle that swam real close then got spooked. A cool crab munching on some white fluff. Returning to the boat in the middle of the night, we left with wonder at life under the sea.

After all these dives, all that was left was a last night luau. Celebrating with Hawaiian shirts, we played volleyball once more, culminating in an epic scouts vs adults match. We won! Then came our last day.... On the bus driving us up the Keys

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back to Miami International, plane ride imminent....  
My eyes watched the swaying palm trees and blue waves, my face reflected a tiny smile onto the wide bus glass, before drifting off to sleep.







# Algonquin Provincial Park

Ontario, Canada

August 12 - August 19, 2023

By Ryan Wark

In August, three scouts (Jay Tyson, Ryan Wark, Varun Kartick) and three adults (Mr. Wark, Mr. Siegle, Mr. Curry) made the trip all the way to Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada. Leading up to the trip we packed all our food and gear and put it into the trucks on the final day before we would leave. Bright and early on Saturday morning we went to the cabin and headed off for the trip. It was about an 8-hour drive with a few breaks in between and eventually, we made it to Canada. The first night we camped at a campground before heading into the wilderness and got our last looks at civilization (and cell service).

The next morning, we woke up and made our way to the docks and got on a jetboat across the Opeongo Lake to our first portage spot. A portage involves carrying all our gear and the canoe through a trail to go to the next point of paddling. Once we completed the first portage of the trip, we did a small amount of paddling before rowing up to our first campsite in the afternoon. We set up our tents and the rest of the site for the first time and had a few free hours before bed. In that time, we had a lot of fun there and went swimming along the island and had a good dinner. We made a fire which took a long time to start due to the wood being wet but by the end it was heating up and after that we settled



into bed. The next morning, we packed up our tents and the rest of the campsite with a good breakfast of pancakes in between. We were back to paddling within a few hours. All around us were just trees,



lakes, and rarely people. This day we had two different portages and a long stretch of paddling. We stopped in the middle for lunch and eventually stopped for good at Big Trout Lake. During the trip, the paddling conditions were on occasion tough and we were getting a taste on this day. We set up camp as usual and went swimming once again. We made dinner and a fire and were really starting to feel that we were in the middle of nowhere. This was also the first day I met up with THE BOX (outdoor latrine), which was a very unpleasant throne but had to be done.

Tuesday we woke up and repeated the cleaning and breakfast process and were on the water rather quickly. We had another two portages and the most paddling yet and got right to it. After hours of hiking and paddling we camped out at Hogan Lake. We set up camp as usual and made a fire along with dinner and before we knew it, we were off to bed. The next morning, we got on the water rather quickly because we had our longest portage yet of over 2 miles. We smashed it out of the park and did it very fast giving us a well-needed head start for the rest of the day. We did more of a common theme



of long paddle session with a stop in the middle for lunch. This was our longest day yet and blisters were forming by the hour. After the long day we took a nap and realized that this was our last full day in the park staying at Proulx Lake. After dinner and our campfire we talked about the trip and other things back at home like school and the rest of our summer. We talked for a while and went to bed knowing we were almost done but just had one day left which turned into a tough one.

On our last paddling day, we woke up bright and early and headed off for our last portage and we were getting a taste of the events to follow. We were promised pizza if we made it back at 10:30AM, that did not happen. We had to paddle around 10 miles in a 15-20 mile an hour headwind. The rookies were lagging behind especially and none of the groups made it in time. Mr. Wark, Ryan, Jay, and Varun were struggling. With about one mile to go we got stopped and almost swamped by waves and had to call for help. Luckily we were close to the



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shore and beached there for a boat to transport us to the dock. I was soaking wet from “abandoning ship” and pulling my boat to shore and many were in the same condition. We flagged down a boat who picked us up and transported us to the docks. We got back and were met by the others and were back to civilization! We bought a few things at the gift shop, took warm showers, and before we knew it we were getting into the trucks and realizing the trip was almost over.

After driving across the border again we camped in a nice campground in New York and knew our trip was done. We woke up the next morning and got back in the trucks, driving home the rest of the way. At around noon on Friday, we finally made it back to the cabin and completed a successful Algonquin trip.

Overall, I had a ton of fun on this trip and would gladly go again sometime in the future!



# 2023 National Jamboree

## National High Adventure Base, Summit Bechtel Reserve, West Virginia

July 19 - July 28, 2023

By: Jay Tyson

Two scouts from Troop 78, Jacob Diederich and Jay Tyson, went to the 2023 National Jamboree this year. To prepare for the Jamboree, we had meetings leading up to the trip where we got together with other scouts from Chester County and organized our troops. Chester County Council had four troops at the Jamboree.

We woke up at 3:00 am on the day of our departure and loaded up the three coach buses that we would be riding. The drive was supposed to be 7 hours long, so naturally it took 9. This year the Jamboree was located at Summit Bechtel Reserve in West Virginia. Once we got there we set up tents in our assigned campsite and we were off. The next 9 days were a blast.

We got to meet plenty of new people from our council and from all over the USA. We went shooting, shot crossbows, went zip-lining and kayaking, and so much more. We even got a ride in a medical Humvee after several of us tumbled on the BMX course. At one end of the reserve there was a military station. We got to do a VR Navy Seal mission, climb on tanks, and learn more about the military. In addition, there were a couple of military aircraft flyovers that were cool, including an E2C Hawkeye and a C130 Hercules. We also saw a Coast Guard helicopter rescue demonstration.

The campsite next to us had some bear visits but luckily no one was harmed. We traded some cool patches, got some merch and we were not fed nearly enough. One day we went white water rafting where we got stuck on some rocks a couple of times and overall had an amazing day. Almost every night there was a basecamp bash. This was a concert hosted by a particular basecamp section and almost everyone showed up. Another night was our OA Summit night. Troops were divided and we got to play games against other troops before having dinner and another concert.

Finally it was time to go home after a very very hot week and a half. We got on the bus once more, which was late, and we were off for another long drive home. The 2023 National Jamboree was a blast and I am very happy that I went.



**Next summer 2024: Philmont and Algonquin**