

My Willistown 78 Boy Scout Years (1956 – 1964)



By Jim Donnelly, Jr.

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This document is dedicated to my parents, Jim and Gladys Donnelly,
who made my Boy Scout experience possible and memorable

Introduction

This biographical sketch was written to capture the experience of growing up while a member of the Willistown 78 scout troop in the middle of the 20th century. The troop had been formed decades before but we went through a growth period about when I joined. Plus we had a young, dedicated, and imaginative troop leader in Ernie Heegard who was supported by a young team of assistant scoutmasters. That combination was, I believe, unique within Chester County Council. I hope that members participating in the 21st century appreciate this aspect of the past and capture today's happenings for the next generation of scouts.

Before becoming a member of Willistown 78, I was a member of a local Cub Scout pack for several years in Darby. In the summer of 1955, we moved to a new house that my parents had built on Woodland Drive. While having a Malvern mailing address, it was actually about two miles from the post office in Willistown Township. My next door neighbor, Jack Diehl, along with his cousin (who lived on the NE corner of Warren Avenue and Paoli Pike), suggested that I join Willistown 78. I believe that in the Fall of 1956, I did that.

The troop met at a simple cabin on Grubb Road, down the street from the VFW, who owned the land and were our sponsors. Compared to today's scout cabin, it was tiny – only about 40 feet square. (An extension was added several years after I joined.) There was a second floor attic where we had lockers that we used to store things like pup tent halves, backpack frames, US Army surplus equipment like shovels, cooking pots, etc.



Most of the scouts were in the Malvern-Paoli-Tredyffrin school system that included Conestoga high school. I was the only scout who attended St. Patrick's in Malvern and Bishop Shanahan high school in West Chester. And we had one Quaker scout – Murray Parker, who when he graduated from Conestoga, went to Earlham College, a Quaker liberal arts school in Richmond, Indiana – and who was my best friend in and outside of scouts.

There was a time when scouts wore their uniforms to school one week in February during "Boy Scout Week." I did that at St. Pat's and my freshman year at Shanahan. I was the only one who did it. There is a woolen uniform shirt in the committee meeting room at the new 78 cabin. The shirt was one bought by my mother and I sewed the badges on. I wore it several times but found it to be too itchy.

G. Ernest Heegard had just become the scoutmaster although I seem to recall that he was still getting some adult support from Link Rice and Stan Burkey's father. Ernie was named to the position when he was only 18 years old so he had transitional support until he was 21.

The troop was comprised of four patrols – Flying Eagle, Stag, Moose, and Panther. Each patrol was made up of six to eight scouts. In time while I was a member, the Rattlesnake patrol was added; Cougar was added later. I became a member of the Panther patrol and Jody Palmer was the leader. He left the troop when he graduated from Conestoga HS and Pete Thorp replaced him. In time, I became the leader.

Each meeting was run basically the same way on Friday nights. Starting at 7:00, it ran until 9:00. The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance and the Scout Oath. We then went around the troop with the patrol leaders reporting on how many were in attendance, absent, or late. We then paid our weekly dues of \$0.10 (!) and then performed the activities planned for that night such as prepare for a First Aid meet, go outside and perform certain athletic challenges (like run 2 miles as close to 15 minutes as possible), using a compass to follow a course laid out (1/4 mile @ 135° followed by.....), practice for the Pass In Review marching event at Horseshoe, etc.

Meetings always ended with some really fun events, like Buck Buck - guys bent over at the waist holding the guy in front of them around their waist while the challengers ran up and tried to see how far they could jump up the line.

We would sometimes have patrol meetings between the troop meetings if the patrol leader thought we needed to work harder to improve our skills. Thank goodness for parents who were willing to drive us here and there on odd nights!

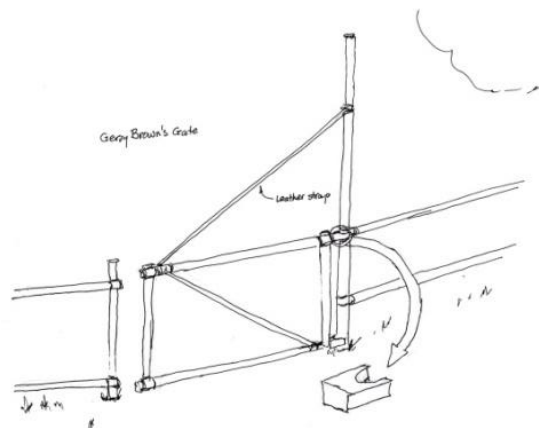
When I joined the troop, there were a number of boys that I became friends with for years, like Stan Burkey (who eventually served the scouting profession in the UK), Miles Stevens, Brian De Haven, Dave Rice (Link's son), Ron and Richie Walter (who lived on Paoli Pike at the end of Woodland Drive), Murray Parker, Ed Paxton, Gerry Brown (the Walters' cousin), Marc Gruss, John Souder, and George Bellgrau.

Willistown 78 always did very well at the First Aid meets that were held for Chester County Council troops at what was then West Chester State Teacher's College (now West Chester University). We did well because we practiced, practiced, practiced. I always thought that other troops could have better results if they made the same investments in time as we did...and had experienced guides and judges when we practiced.

We also did very well marching at reveille or Pass In Review when all the scouts at Horseshoe would march up to the parade ground and, after the flag was taken down, would march up to the top of the field, then across it so we could do a "right flank" and walk down in front of the adults leaders who would vote on the best group. We looked sharp with our campaign hats, and we usually had two lines of boys marching. To win five times out of seven was not unusual.

Beginning Thanksgiving weekend, we sold Christmas trees as a fund raiser with several other local troops like Malvern, Paoli, and Berwyn. The trees were sold at the corner of Lancaster Avenue and Rte. 252 on what was then the Acme parking lot. A PNC Bank is located there now. The understanding was that each troop would have several boys there when the sales were underway so that the proceeds would be evenly divided. If a boy did not show up, then someone from another troop could take his place and get credit for that slot. Because 78 always had more boys there than were needed, I believe that we got more proceeds than the other troops. The thing I remember most was the cold and the smell of pine trees. Gloves certainly helped.

Each spring, the scouts would cook a dinner for our parents. There was an area about 50 yards away across the creek that ran by the cabin and up the hill to the southwest. We would lay out tables, chairs, and the necessary utensils, etc. in a partially cleared area in the trees. We would start fires for cooking the food and, while I don't recall it being great food, I never heard anyone complain. I remember one time after the meal, Link Rice got up and gave praise for a gate that Gerry Brown made probably 50 feet away. He mentioned of the engineering talent that was involved. Simple, but Link was right. Interestingly, when we had the 80th Troop Reunion in 2015, I asked Gerry if he remembered the event just described and he did not.



Link Rice was an interesting person. A longtime supporter of scouting in general and Willistown 78, he was also associated with the local Girl Scout troop with his wife. I remember several times, Link's son, Davey, and I got into the back seat of Link's four door sedan with another boy. The front seat at that time was a bench seat (not the bucket seats that became popular in the 1960s). Mrs. Rice did not sit next to the car door on the right but in the middle next to her husband, like they were teenagers on a date.

When I became old enough to be an Explorer, I was asked at some time to help organize a dance for Chester County Council boys and girls at a school in West Goshen. Dances at that time were generally held on school gym floors or roller rinks and were called "sock hops" because we had to take off our shoes off so that the floors would not be scuffed. They also played popular rock 'n' roll songs that might be heard on the radio. For some reason, we had several bands try out for the dance and the successful four member band was led by a trumpeter named John Sicoli who was in my class at Shanahan. About two dozen youths showed up but the jazzy-type music was not a winner and I don't think any other dances were held after that.

I graduated from high school in 1962. I stayed as involved with the troop as best I could during my freshman year but studying mechanical engineering at Villanova proved to be extremely difficult. One weekend, I was with the rest of the Willistown troops at the Devon Horse Show in May 1963. We did the mundane things that scouts now do at the Radnor Hunt Club. Walking across the parking lot, I bumped into Grace Nawn, a girl that I met in high school when she was a freshman and I was a senior, and her mother. We had dated a couple of times but didn't hit it off. I mentioned that I would be doing some Indian dancing at the horse grounds that night if she'd be interested. She was. I picked her up, she saw me dance around half naked, we went to the Paoli Diner on Lancaster Avenue for some sundaes, and a year later I stopped by the old cabin on Friday night and told them that I was dropping out of the troop as a Junior Assistant Scoutmaster. No problem – there were lots of new boys backfilling the troop. But the good news is that Gay and I have now been married more than 50 years. I don't think it was my dancing skills.

One of the interesting things about Willistown 78 is that multiple activities are scheduled throughout the entire month and that practice continues today. All one needs to do is look at the monthly Newsletter to see how involved the troop is.

Valley Forge Day Trips

At 7 miles, Valley Forge is close enough that we could easily make a day trip over and back. In what I think was my first year in the troop, probably in the Spring of 1957, we walked over there. I know it was early in my scouting career because I wore a heavy canvass backpack that may have been Army surplus. I have no idea where I got it but I remember when we were at the end of the excursion walking up the hill on Old Lincoln Highway in Malvern that Ernie asked me if I needed any help. I was probably no happier in my life when he took it off me.

One other time, a bunch of us got together and rode our bikes over and back. Of course, these were all heavy one-speed bikes of the time. Much easier than walking over. However, I also learned that if you are riding bikes in a single line, you have to give a warning to the rider behind you if you are going to stop. Let's say that Murray was very forgiving.

Camping Over On West Chester Pike

There was a report that the last remaining survivor of the Lenni Lenape Indian tribe lived over on West Chester Pike near Edgemont. She was over 90 years old and lived in a two story stone house that was probably built using stone from the area like a lot of older houses built in the late 1800s. I seem to recall that it was between the Pike and Goshen Road and west of Providence Road and that we got there by walking down Sugartown Road.

We walked across a snow covered field to the top of the hill above the house which was to our left (East). We had packed a dinner (no cooking), pup tents and sleeping bags. I believe that it was in February and cold at night. But capturing the heat in the pup tents and our sleeping bags made for a good night's sleep.

Camping in Devault

There was a business man who supported scouting and owned some property that he opened up to all Diamond Rock district scout troops on two late Spring weekends in (I believe) 1958 and 1959. The site can be found by driving on PA Rte. 29 north past Swedesford Road and going to

the bottom of the hill. On the right side of Rte. 29, there was a small place where the scouts could get out of the cars on Friday and leave on Sunday. We would then walk toward a stone farmhouse on the left and cross a creek that I believe was Valley Creek. We would then set up tents on the hillside that was cut in half by some trees. There were a number of troops there but I don't recall what we did.

The farmhouse was built around 1800 and was bought and renovated in the 1950s. It became East Whiteland Township property in 1972. It was to be renovated in 2012. It is now part of Valley Creek Park.

Camp Horseshoe Summer Camp



Camp Horseshoe on the Mason-Dixon Line was always a good time. At the time I first went, I believe that it cost about \$50 per week and the scout troop always went the same two weeks every year. Of course because the minimum wage was only \$1.00 per hour back then, \$50 was still quite an expense. When I went down in the Summer of 1958, we stayed at Kit Carson but then we changed over to Dan Beard. I don't know why the change was made but they were side by side and basically the same distance from the Dining Hall. Both tent sites had two man tents and could accommodate about 36 boys and several adults.

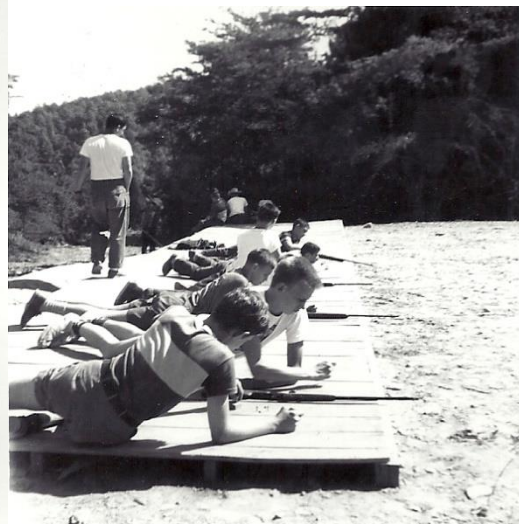
Arriving on Sunday, all boys staying at the camp had to visit the Health Lodge beside the parade ground to turn in the required health documents and pass a perfunctory health exam by a physician. My family doctor, Dr. Roberts, who practiced his profession and lived on Monument Avenue in Malvern, sometimes examined me. (Later, when I was 18 years old and checking in as a counsellor, I developed appendicitis and he sent me to West Chester Hospital, which is no longer in existence. I was able to get back to the camp about five days later.)

Each morning, there would be a recorded bugle call at 7:00 over the loud speaker system. We would get up and use the facilities that each camp had. We would get dressed in our usual attire: Boy Scout shorts, a T-shirt, socks, and usually sneakers. Some even wore Horseshoe t-shirts. When we dressed for the parade grounds at the end of the day, all scouts dressed in their full uniforms.



We would walk up to the Dining Hall for breakfast which was served by a scout at each table walking to the serving aisle back by the kitchen and getting the food for our table. The kitchen was staffed by two cooks named Charley and Percy Henry who worked at Lincoln University but came down to Horseshoe during the summer months to earn some extra money. I seem to recall that there were scouts in the kitchen area that helped with the cleanup.

After breakfast, we would go back to our campsite until 9:00 when the training classes would begin for boys to earn the credits they needed to be promoted in rank, earn a merit badge, or attend other areas for woodworking, archery, sharpshooting, etc. We had signed up for these courses in advance so we could attend several during the morning and afternoon.



Lunch was served at noon followed by rest time, more classes, and swimming in the Olympic-sized pool. The pool was also used for boys to attain their swimming and lifesaving merit badges. It was much easier to do this at camp rather than back home. Back then, the pool was

large enough to accommodate all of the scouts who were staying at Horseshoe any particular week. It may still be.



Retreat was always a special time. We would all get dressed in our Class A scout uniforms and form into a column before marching up to the Parade Grounds. Bass and snare drums were played to provide a military effect. All troops formed in a line across from the flag pole and the line of adult leaders and we stood at Parade Rest. The leader of each scout troop would then report on the number of scouts present, sick, or whatever to the Camp Director. We would then stand at attention when the flag was being lowered. If you look at the videos on You Tube of recent retreat ceremonies, there are some differences but the overall event is unchanged. One difference that I noticed is that most of the troops march in something approaching a square formation. If there were 20 boys, they would form into a group 4 x 5. Willistown 78 marched back then in two long rows up to the top of the parade ground, formed the same two rows across the top of the field, and then did a Right Flank. I also noted on You Tube that only the leader of the troop would turn his head and salute the camp director although in one case the boys at the end of each row would also turn their heads but not salute. I believe that we marched down the field, the boys at the end would march facing forward but all of the other boys would do an Eyes Left when the leader turned his head and saluted. And there was a bugle played when the flag was being lowered and a cannon shot off when the flag was down.

I always thought that Willistown 78, dressed as we were in campaign hats, looked the best dressed of the competition.

One important day was when the candidates selected for induction into the Order of the Arrow were pulled out of line and “tapped” by scouts dressed as Indians. I remember one special ceremony when I was one of the Indians and I got to “tap...tap, tap” my father.

(Note: In 2018 when my father was celebrating his 95th birthday, I described the honor I had in tapping him out, and knowing that almost nobody in the audience knew what I was talking about, I asked Ernie to do just that to me. And he did, with full force. I survived.)

The actual induction ceremony was performed at a small hillside circled with large boulders behind the McIlvane Lodge. It was fantastically beautiful, memorable, and impressive when lit with candles. I understand that the area has been restructured and renamed Achgeketum ("Teacher") Fire Circle in honor of Ernie Heegard and the OA ceremonies are now performed across from athletic field on the Right Bank of the Octorara Creek.

There was a ranger by the name of George Cole that was employed to keep an eye on the camp all year 'round. I believe that he performed the basic maintenance and probably arranged for others to perform more complex repairs. He was kind of interesting because he drove an old Willys Jeep with an enclosed canvas top that provided shade in the summer and kept the heat in during the winter. I think he lived just off the reservation land on the way in from Route 1. He had gutted a two story stone building and was in the process of rebuilding it. He had a severe limp as he walked - his left leg, as I recall, bowed inward. It did not seem to affect his work in any way. And I believe that his son, Roy, replaced him when he retired in the 1970s.

One of the really fun times was the period immediately after eating dinner when Ernie, who worked as the camp director for a number of years, would lead the boys in the Dining Hall in songs. We would sing (*Up In the Air*) *Junior Birdman*, *Green Grow the Rushes (Oh!)*, *Garry Owen*, *Cock Robin*, and lots of songs that can now be found on the Official Songbook posted on the camp website. Or you can watch Ernie lead the songs on You Tube.

And there were nights when there would be a campfire set up on the Athletic Field for singalongs as well as telling *The Cremation of Sam McGee* and similar stories.

When we went to bed, there was music played over the loud speakers beginning around 9:45 with Tex Ritter singing *The Deck of Cards* followed by *The Lord's Prayer*, and finally *Taps*. To listen to these songs and the solitude afterwards while looking up at the stars from your bunk was extremely satisfying and quieting.

On Sunday mornings after breakfast, all the Protestant boys would walk up a chapel area above one of the Octorara bends for services. We Catholics would ride into nearby Rising Sun, Maryland to visit St. Agnes Catholic Church on South Queen Street. When we visited the church, it was a small wooden chapel just feet away from the road. It has since been replaced by a brick church although it doesn't look that much bigger.

I was fortunate to be a camp counsellor for two years before I began studying to be a mechanical engineer at Villanova. A description of these two years can be found below.

Camp Horseshoe Winter Weekend

Camping at Browning Lodge at Camp Horseshoe in the middle of winter with temperatures below freezing was always an experience that the troop repeated year after year. The lodge was built in the 1920s and modern conveniences were lacking although I seem to recall that they had a functioning lavatory underneath the main building.

Arriving early Friday evening, the first order of business was heat the place up by starting the fire in the fireplace and a wood stove. There was chopped wood outside and I assume that we had some dry ones inside. I seem to recall that there were about twelve double bunks upstairs and several downstairs. Having sleeping bags made sleeping through the night comfortable. And we would spend Saturday splitting logs. Certainly more than we would ever need.



And it was always fun to walk around and see the campgrounds, buildings, and other areas that we used during the summer. Of course, having decent winter coats, hats, and gloves were a must.

Except for the photo of the Panther Patrol on the right above, I don't recall being down there and not having snow on the ground. The photo of the back of Browning was taken during the Summer.

Camp Counselor Positions

During the Summer of 1961, I served as a counselor at Horseshoe teaching Cooking Merit Badge classes. I don't recall seeing any Position Description when I applied for the job or after I was hired. And it's a bit hard to look at the existing Staff Job Position Descriptions and see where I would fit in today but I'm sure I would. I believe that basically we performed whatever tasks were required to keep the camp healthy and productive.

I believe that the camp staff stayed in a separate area at the Roberts tent site.

A year later, I was assigned to work at a site that was SW of the main camp and across the Octorara under the supervision of Cecil Goode, a fine scout leader from Kennett Square, and another scout named Dave Coughlan who was my age and from West Chester. We had a modest one story structure which had a kitchen, storage space, and not much else. You got to the camp by crossing a suspension bridge over the creek from the end of the trail that went up to Bayard Taylor, Davy Crockett, and Conestoga camp sites. You then walked up a short distance on Quarry Road which was then a dirt road. Dave and I set up two tents end-to-end on a wooden platform so we could sleep in the back tent and used the front tent as a reading/living room. I think that Cecil slept in the building. We had a truck that could be used by driving the long way around to the main camp to get supplies.

The concept was to build on something like the Boy Scout Jamboree but anyone who stayed at this site would still need to go to the main camp for merit badges, meals, showers, etc. Dave and I cleared an area and set up some tents but I don't recall ever getting any troops there.

And we had lots and lots of copperhead snakes.

This camp was NOT what was called the Explorer base and eventually became Camp Ware. That camp is NE of Flagpole Hill. If you look at an aerial of the area where I worked, it has been consumed by the Allan Myers-Cedar Hill Quarry and Quarry Road. The building that we had there is gone.



1962 CAMP HORSESHOE STAFF

→ 1962 CAMP STAFF ←

TOP ROW (L. TO R.)
 *CARL LANG, KEN WOLFEWORTH, ED STODDARD, *DAVE ROBERTS,
 *TOM HANSEL, CARROLL (GOOSE) LEFER, NICK GOJATUS, *RALPH SWARTZ,
 JIM DONNELLY, *HARC GRIS, *ERNE HERBERG, *BOB MARQUETTE

MIDDLE ROW (L. TO R.)
 WALT WEAVER, *LEOY ~~SWARTZ~~ ^{CIRCUIT}, WARREN RASCH, ~~JOHN~~ ^{JOHN} HOFFMAN,
 *JIM DILLIARD, JERRY BECHIN, BOB WALTER, DAVE COUGLAN,
 JIM COLE

SECOND ROW (L. TO R.)
 *DICK BURKHART, *CLIFF (SHOCKY) ARKETT, *BILL GILLER, BOB FARRAR,
 STEVE MEYERS, BOB LILL, JOHN TAYLOR, ED PARDEN, *DEN SHAPSON

FRONT ROW (L. TO R.)
 JIM GOS, *GARY MARSHALL, *HOWARD (HOLIE) HITEON, *KEN JENSEN,
 GORDY POCANAN, *DAVE ANDREWS

MISSING: LEE RICHARDSON, JOHN CASSIL

* DEPARTMENT HEADS
 † ADMINISTRATION
 * JAMBO STAFF

Order of the Arrow

The Octoraro Lodge 22 charter was approved in 1926 and funding to build the cabin that now exists was approved in 1952. It was finally open on June 20, 1959, about the time that I was inducted into the Order of the Arrow at the Ordeal level. I remember it as a brand new building. I supported the Lodge as did most members, participating in ceremonies as requested. I was later promoted to the Brotherhood level after about two years.



Canada 1958

On July 13, 1958, fourteen scouts and two adults (Ernie Heegard and my father, Jim Donnelly, Sr.) met at the Tredyffrin Elementary School parking lot on Lloyd Avenue in Malvern. I look at the photos I have of those going and can recognize:

Ernie Heegard
Chip Hughes
Stan Burkey
Dave Weld

Jim Donnelly Sr.
Richie Walter
Miles Stevens
John Souder

Pete Thorpe
Jack Scott
George Bellgrau
Ron Walter

Davy Rice
Brian De Haven
Dave Pollock
(And me)



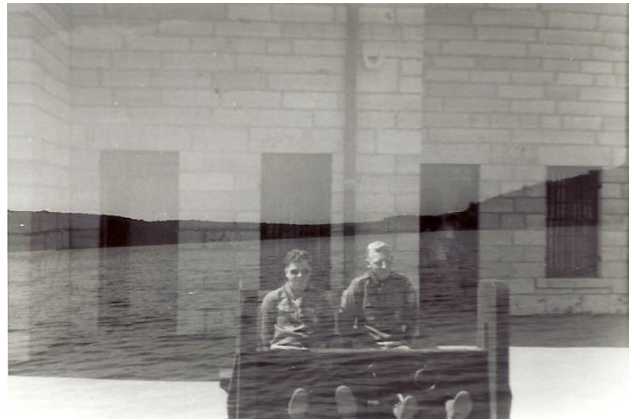
(Photo by John Souder)

We loaded up three cars including two station wagons before taking off for the Pennsylvania Turnpike NE Extension, heading for the St. Lawrence River in northern New York State.

We took Horne's Ferry tugster William Darrell that was used as a side-loaded ferry from Cape Vincent NY to Wolfe Island ON.



Driving over the island, we loaded on another ferry to get to Kingston ON. When we got there, we visited the Fort Henry National Historical Site, a restored 19th century British military fort. We witnessed some parades in the courtyard, visited the museum, and photographed Ernie and Dad in stocks.



(Note: Eleven years later, my wife, one year old daughter, and I stayed in Kingston at the end of a trip that began at Niagara Falls and proceeded to Toronto and Kingston where we visited the fort. It had not changed.)

We then went on to Algonquin Provincial Park where we picked up our six fiberglass canoes and started our traverse of some of the many lakes that were in the park. We had some windy days and saw storms off in the distance but we were spared rain. Having the number of canoes we did meant that each canoe had either two or three riders. And you needed to have three people carry each canoe because of their weight. I believe that fiberglass canoes back then weighed between 50 and 75 lbs. Not too bad if you are only going 100 yards but understand that you also have to unload the packed cargo (meaning food, cooking supplies, clothes, sleeping bags, tents, etc.) and move it as well, it can be challenging.



I believe that we spent six days and five nights on the lakes. In most cases, we were able to use existing campsites but there were several nights where we had to make our own. The paths between lakes were usually well marked with a wooden sign that might read something like, "PORTAGE PREVENT FOREST FIRES 60 yards to Madawaska River." There was one portage, however, that was extremely long because it looked like a logging company had disturbed the trail system. As it was, we didn't get to the next lake and find a place using flashlights to stop and camp until 2:00 the next morning. The area was small, elevated, and right on the water's edge. We had cans of chili that we were able to heat up and eat. I hated chili...until that night. We covered ourselves in our ponchos to protect our sleeping bags from the dew.

We had to deal with beaver dams blocking the way, marshes with passageways that were not obvious, logjams, and head winds. But we were also able to practice for our canoeing merit badges, by tipping the canoes over and up righting them. And we had some pretty decent meals for the days we were out canoeing. I believe that the food was prepackaged but we had Dutch ovens and plenty of pots.

When we left Algonquin Park, we went down to Niagara Falls. We stayed near the park and then visited in daylight. We were able to see the Canadian Horseshoe Falls and American Falls, walk behind the Canadian falls, along the Niagara River where we could see the Maid of the Mist, the cable car that goes across the river, and the whirlpool at the river's bend. At night, we saw the Falls lit with lights.

The next day, we stopped at Watkins Glen before returning home.

New Orleans 1960

A week before Easter around April 11th, the following 11 scouts left Malvern to New Orleans:

Brian De Haven
Marc Gruss
Ernie Heegard

Ron Walters
Murray Parker
Jim Donnelly, Sr.

Richie Walters
Miles Stevens
(And me)

George Bellgrau
John Souder

We took the PA Turnpike west to Carlisle where we got off and picked up US Rte. 11 and headed south to Knoxville TN. Nowadays, it would be a simple 7:30 hour trip on I-81. But we got off Rte. 11 and found a place to sleep overnight on the other side of Knoxville.



The next day, we went to Meridian, Mississippi. We stopped there because Leo and Regina Donnelly (my father's uncle and aunt) had relocated from Philadelphia and raised their family there. I have been able to maintain contact over the years with a cousin that I met during this visit.



(Photo by John Souder)

We then drove down and across Lake Pontchartrain to New Orleans where we stayed at the Navy barracks through arrangements made by Ernie. We toured Bourbon Street (it looks the same today), Café du Monde, Jackson Square, St. Louis Cathedral and the nearby artist alley, Canal Street, the Mississippi River, and the Audubon Park next to Loyola University. In short, all the downtown tourist attractions. But being underage boys in Scout uniforms, we were limited as

to where we could go, of course. My father was also able to meet briefly with his cousin Bobby Donnelly (a son of Uncle Leo) and his wife Mercedes.



When we left New Orleans, we travelled east toward Mobile, Alabama. Before we reached the bridge crossing the lower part of Lake Pontchartrain, we saw an old fort on the south side of the road. This was one of a number of forts built during the early 1800s along the Gulf coast. We were able to find a way across the moat and into the structure.



(Note: When my wife and I visited New Orleans in 2010, we found the fort – called the Fort Pike Historical Site - was fenced off and closed. We could not see anything but the top few feet of the ramparts. See the photos below.)

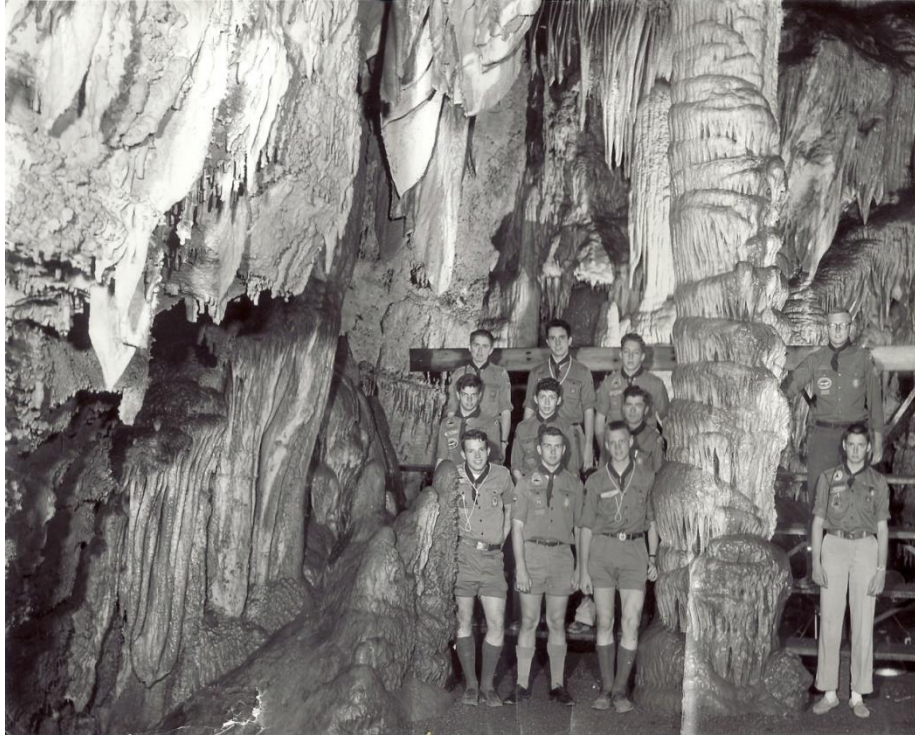


We drove along the coast and then headed inland until we could find a place to sleep. I think that we used a piece of Boy Scout property south of the Smokey Mountains.



The next day we came up on a car accident that had just happened. We stood there and helped as best we could and then went on through the Smokey Mountain NP before visiting Luray Caverns in NW Virginia





Overall, one of the best trips one could make, especially because I met some extended family, something that would have been unlikely otherwise.

Philmont 1960

In the summer of 1960, 29 scouts from Chester County (including three adult leaders) travelled to the Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico. Four scouts from Willistown 78 were included – Murray Parker, Ed Paxton, Dave Clark, and me. Philmont is only 27 hours (1,755 miles) from Paoli but I believe that we took three days to get there, what with all the sites to see. For a 16 year old, it was a memorable experience.



We started off on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, and then drove through West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, the panhandle of Texas, Colorado, and New Mexico. I believe that we stopped overnight in Springfield IL and Garden City KS. Garden City is interesting because it has the world's largest outdoor concrete swimming pool with 2,200,000 gallons of water and able to accommodate 2,000 people at a time.

We had a very considerate Reading Lines Trailways bus driver by the name of Remington White. I know that arrangements were probably made by the Council to make the journey as informative and entertaining as possible but he stopped at every state line so that, in many cases, the scouts could be photographed around it.



On the way west, we stopped at the Indianapolis Speedway; the Ernie Pyle Monument in Dana IN; the Lincoln home and lawyer's office in Springfield IL; the Lincoln Tomb at Oak Ridge Cemetery IL; the Truman Presidential Library in Independence MO; Fort Larned KS; Dodge City and Boot Hill KS (both set up for tourists); Garden City KS, of course, where we went swimming; the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs CO, and the Koshare Indian Museum in La Junta CO. Once we got to Philmont, we were able to tour the Villa Philmonte mansion of Waite Miller, who donated the ranch land to the Boy Scouts. And we took a day trip to Kit Carson's nearby homestead.

Our group broke up into three smaller teams. Ours was headed by Bill Sortino from West Chester. Included in our group were Ed Paxton and Murray Parker. If you look at the itineraries that are available today, there is a choice of either 7 or 12 day excursions available and I'm sure

that each team had 7 day trips selected for us. Days 1 and 7 are leaving or returning to the base camp. The distances travelled can be between 25 and 51 miles. If you look at the options available today (fly fishing, musket loading shooting, rock climbing, blacksmithing, and an Aztec mine tour), these were not part of any of our itineraries.

What we did was go in a circuitous tour with burros or horses for some stretches. One particular day hiking was enlightening in that, reading the topographical map we had, I estimated that we were at a certain point when it turned out the distance to the next camp was quite a bit farther. In fact, two other boys and I became exhausted and dehydrated to the point that when we did reach our destination, the local scout ranger put us in his beds so we could rest and recover. Interesting thing is that I made a chocolate cake with icing that night using a Dutch oven. I got raves for that.



We did find out that there were bears in the area. One night, we were sleeping in pup tents and had our food bagged and strung up in a tree. A bear came into our camping area and he came up and licked Mr. Sortino's bald head. Naturally, he screamed and the bear took off, thankfully.

There were times when we were able to check out the areas around where we were camping. Several of us went up to a flat area that had a shallow (inches deep) pond in the field and we took advantage of the opportunity to take something like a swim.

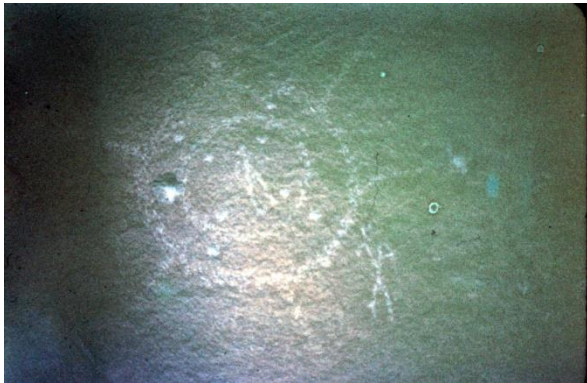


Another time, we went up to the top of some pine trees and could see what we believed was Pike's Peak on the northern horizon.

And, yes, we did see some Indian writing in stone.

Another time, Ed, Murray, and I were walking on a dirt truck road and saw some boulders along the side of the road. They appeared to be laminated and I was able to open several of them up using a rock as a hammer. I found fossils of ferns in the rocks. I put several in the pack I had with me and took them back to my Shanahan HS science teacher.

(Note: Shanahan moved from West Chester to Downingtown many years ago. I had an email exchange with the head of the school science department in January 2019 and they could not find the fossils. They probably got lost in the move.)



The only downside of the time we had at Philmont was the fact that the Boy Scout Jamboree was being celebrated in Colorado Springs about the same time period as we were there, so many of those kids came down to Philmont for a day and bought out all of the knickknacks from the trading post.

Maine 1961

Having had such a good experience in Canada three years earlier, I think we all expected Maine to be a good opportunity. On August 19th, the following scouts left for Maine:

Miles Stevens	Gerry Brown	John Souder	Edgar Paxton
Mike Preston	Mike Cummins	John Coleman	Alan Jones
Ernie Heegard	Elbert (Chip) Hughes	(And me)	

We drove up US Rte. 1 to Bar Harbor. Today, it would take about 9 hours; then was probably another hour or so more. We saw some evidence of the rocky coast of Maine on the way up there but it was most evident when we entered Acadia National Park and drove up to the top of Cadillac Mountain. We then drove about another hour West over to Bangor.

(Note: My wife and I stopped at Bar Harbor on our way back from New Brunswick in 2017. There were three cruise ships parked out in the harbor and all of their tourists were sitting around the town square. But Acadia NP itself is every bit as beautiful and rugged as I remember it)



Bangor at that time was a small city surrounded by miles and miles of trees. LL Bean was a target for camping and hunting supplies and we stopped at their main store there. (There are three there now.)

(Note: We stopped in Bangor in 2017 before heading up to Quebec City. The town has spread out quite a bit and we stayed a couple of miles out of the town center because it made access to I-95 much easier. I looked up LL Bean on Yelp but didn't have time to search them out.)

We then went to Baxter State Park 96 miles north of Bangor. Inside the park is Mount Kahtahdin (5,269 ft. altitude, 4,288 ft. prominence). Naturally being young, healthy Boy Scouts, we decided to climb it. I don't think we made it half way up; I believe that we couldn't even see the peak from where we stopped. Let's just say that the boulders we had to deal with were huge.



We went a few miles south to Moosehead Lake, about 75 miles SW of Baxter SP. We were able to rent some boats with outboard motors on the back. We went to some spot on either Moosehead Lake or one of the connecting lakes for the night. We returned the equipment the next morning. I don't think anybody who had gone on the Canadian canoe trip three years earlier was impressed.





But driving around the state displayed things like jams in rivers.



One other stop was at the Penobscot Indian Reservation on Indian Island ME, about half way between Baxter SP and Bangor.



On August 27th, we were back home.

Florida 1962

The scouts liked to take trips over the spring breaks that happened at schools around Easter. Naturally, the days selected were based on when Conestoga HS was off. Catholic schools were open all week until Good Friday and the Monday after Easter. However, with a note from my parents, I was able to get released from schooling for five days.



I took a photo of everybody eating lunch at a segregated (Black) beach shelter in the east coast on the way back. There were either eight or nine people in the photo, plus me taking the photograph. I believe the following went on the trip:

Ernie Heegard
Marc Gruss

Jim Donnelly, Sr.
Mike Preston

Ed Paxton
(And me)

George Bellgrau

Plus two or three more.

Like the trip to Maine the year before and before the Interstate System was as well developed as it is today, I believe we went down US Rte. 1 to Florida, driving straight through and only stopping at a Stuckey's "South of the Border." We crossed the state line around 2:00 AM. An hour or so later, a side road allowed us to find a place to sleep.

The first day, we went to Silver Springs where the water was so clear that TV shows like "Sea Hunt" with Lloyd Bridges could be filmed there. And then on to Cyprus Gardens which is SW of Orlando. The site had a large botanical garden, glass butterfly house, and a lake where a water skiing show was put on. We then went to Tampa where we stayed overnight in an orange orchard owned by a friend of the Heegards who relocated to Florida.

(Note: In 2002, my wife attended a conference for her banking employer in Orlando and I flew down to join her for the weekend. We went to Cyprus Gardens and it looked like it was frozen in time. Even the girls who put on the skiing show looked like they were wearing the same one piece bathing suits as they did 30 years earlier. Several years later, Cyprus Gardens went bankrupt and closed for two years until they were bought and merged with Legoland.)

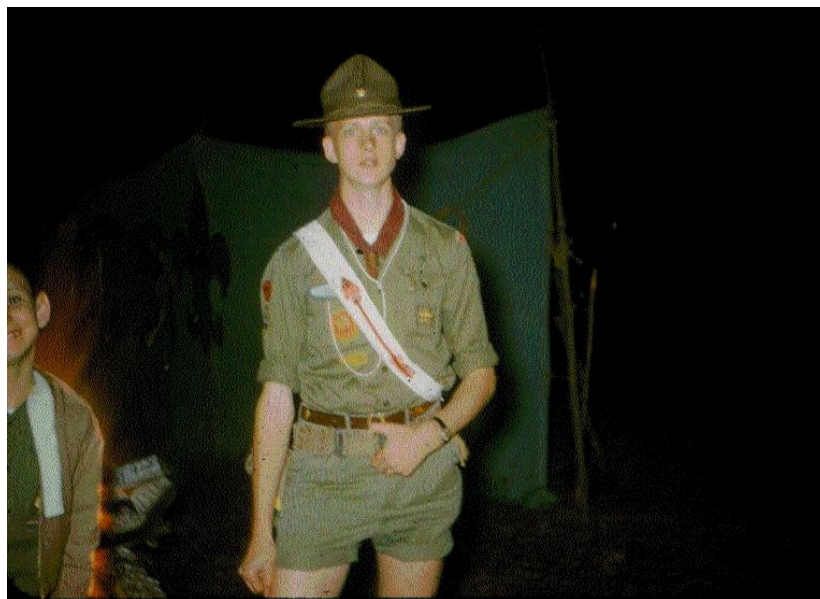


The next day, we drove down the west part of Florida to the Everglades in the south, stopping to see alligators on the side of the road, then walking out into the Everglades on a boardwalk (hammock), then going to Flamingo, the southernmost point of land on mainland United States. (Key West is off the coast.) The view from the Flamingo Lodge visitor's center was spectacular. I had seen the Atlantic Ocean numerous times but this was the first time I saw the bright blue Gulf of Mexico. (Unfortunately, back-to-back hurricanes have seriously damaged the lodge recently and it needs to be renovated.)



We then drove up the east coast through Miami at night. I was impressed, seeing the lit hotels from what looked like they were from the TV detective show, "Surfside 6."

We drove up to a beach spot south of St. Augustine but had to leave around 2 o'clock in the morning because of the mosquitos. The next day we were home.



Jim Donnelly, Jr. back then