



BLUFF LINES

Fourth Edition, April 2024



The journal of the Camp Orr Alumni Association and Friends of Camp Orr, remembering and preserving the legacy of scouting summers in the Buffalo River Valley.

Hey, Camp Orr Alumni, we're still at it with our fourth quarterly Bluff Lines.

Check in frequently and add informally on our Facebook page,
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CampOrrAlumniAssociation>



Swimming hole looking downriver

The membership requirements for the Camp Orr Alumni Association are 1) treasured memories of scouting summers in the Buffalo River Valley and 2) a desire to preserve and share them. Please send in your own memories, even if it's a snippet and/or pictures; we'll contact you and see if we can work it into an article. Forward this to your old Camp Orr buddies, and/or forward us their email address.

In this Edition:

- The Rustic Theatre Delivered the Fun!
- My first Camp Orr and the Monsoon of 1959
- Uncle Fank Lewis
- Camp Orr summer update

Rustic Theater Delivered the Fun!

By Judge Shawn J. Johnson
Camp Orr Camper, 1987-1990
Camp Orr Staff, 1991-1993

My first of four summers as a camper at Camp Orr began in 1987. Among all of the excitement of that other-worldly place in Newton County that seemed far away from my family in Fort Smith—the thrill of Antenna Pine, the musty smell of the canvas tents, the majestic elk standing in the lower field—the most memorable experience were the midweek evening activities across the river at the Rustic Theater.



As I recall, it happened on Wednesdays. In order to give the kitchen staff the night off and the opportunity to join in the Rustic Theater festivities, troops had to cook for themselves. Troops were given ground beef, potatoes, and onions to make foil dinners in their campfires. Traditionally, my group from Fort Smith Troop 3 trekked to Kyle's Landing to do this on the banks of the Buffalo and beneath the cathedral backdrop formed by the bluffs. Once at Kyle's Landing, we were near the famed Rustic Theater where staff would soon convene to put on the most memorable campfire of the week.

During my three years on staff (1991, 1992, and 1993), this tradition continued. The staff had a curated list of time-honored skits and sketches—think “Saturday Night Live”—from singing “The Titanic”, “The Ocean Waves May Roll,” “Mountain Dew,” and Johnny Cash classics to



recitation of “The Cremation of Sam McGee” and short sketches that got all the laughs.

One particular sketch involved a staffer portraying a tourist with a camera who would blind the audience with a perfectly timed flash photo while spotting an imaginary snake on the stage floor. The photo of the audience here reflects this moment when my camera was used by the staffer to make it happen.



BLUFF LINES



Another song depicted the kitchen staff dressed with aprons, chef hats (or “toques”) and kitchen spoons and spatulas singing “Camp food, camp food, the food that makes rats afraid; some say camp food tastes more like my mom’s homemade...” The irony depicted by the kitchen staff singing a song about their roles at camp was simply hilarious.

I am sad that the Rustic Theater—a barn across the river—ceased to be used at some point. And then, without proper maintenance, it fell into a dangerous condition and couldn’t be saved.

Why is any of this significant? It is because the stories stick with us through our sensory impressions. The sounds, the smells, the way they made us feel. If you’ll listen to the linked YouTube audio segments above while reading this, the photos will come to life, and they take on a new significance.

Look at the honest expressions on those faces in the audience. The hope, the sense of adventure, the lives that they are no doubt all living now as parents, as community contributors, and hopefully as sustaining Scouters. Rustic Theater brought enjoyment and happiness to so many. I am grateful for those memories.



Shawn Johnson is an Eagle Scout (Class of 1992) from Fort Smith. He holds degrees from Hendrix College, the University of St. Andrews (Scotland), and the University of Arkansas School of Law. In 2021, he was sworn in as a circuit judge in Little Rock, Arkansas. He currently serves as Vice President of District Operations for the Natural State Council. As a staffer at Camp Orr, he worked on the waterfront staff (“the bronze gods” as they were jokingly known then), under Camp Director John Easterly, Program Directors Bill Bracken and Paul Schemel, and Waterfront Directors Alan Eggleston and Mike McBee.

Editors note: *When Camp Orr was acquired, the barn that became the Rustic Theatre, part of an old homestead, was on the property; it sat along the River Jeep Road that was the trail upriver to Mud Cave and Hemmed in Hollow. It was used as storage for the camp before becoming the Theatre. Attached is a picture of it in 1966, as Scouts hike towards it on their way upriver for an overnight camp. Since then, not only has the barn deteriorated to an unsafe condition, the pastures of 1966 have become mature forests; see the pictures below taken during the Camp Orr alumni reunion in November 2023.*





BLUFF LINES



My first Camp Orr and the Monsoon of 1959

David Widder, Camper 1959-1961, Junior Staff 1961-1963

My first trip to Camp Orr was in 1959, I had just turned 12 and joined Fayetteville's Troop 102 in the fall of 1958. Our scoutmaster at that time was Benny Winborn who went on to a long administrative career in the Fayetteville schools.

My scout camping buddy was Martin Butt. Although we attended different schools we became partners in mischief at Sunday school. We were usually tent mates, as we were at Camp Orr and the following summer at the 50th National Jamboree. In preparation for camp, we were provided a list of what to bring, I presume from the Council office. Such useful items as a toothbrush, soap (I don't know why as both showers and latrines were in short supply at camp in 1959!), flashlight, scout knife, etc. We were supervised by Wayne White, then Superintendent of the Fayetteville Public Schools—years later he was my faculty colleague at Virginia Tech.

The first day of camp finally arrived and we set out for the grueling trip over rough and steep roads. At that time I believe the only paved road in Newton County was Highway 7 through Jasper. We were checked in and the troop went to pick up our gear at the quartermaster building. The tents were wall tents of very heavy canvas, no tent frames or floors, with a 2x4 ridge pole and end poles. We also received canvas and wood army issue folding cots. We hauled our equipment to our campsite about halfway up the trail to the water tower and set it up.

By the next day the main feature of the week had begun – rain and lots of it. Also high winds and violent storms. Most outdoor activities could not be held with the exception of Mr. Lewis' first aid class that was held indoors. He was Mr. Lewis and Mr. Scouting to us. It was a few years before Pat Bolin dubbed him “Uncle Frank”. Mainly campers hung out and tried to stay dry at the Mess Hall and Trading Post. The river was raging high and there was mud everywhere.

Martin and I were in our tent a lot. That campsite was far from level, probably at least a 15-degree slope. As the rains came, a river of water ran through the dirt and rock floor of the tent going downhill, so we had to keep ourselves and our belongings on the cot and watch the water swirl around its legs. We were like drowned rats! Finally we trenched the tent—a big no-no today—and that helped some. Eventually the winds begin to howl, blowing down branches and trees. This lasted several days.

The included photo shows our main project for the week, a Troop 102 tower!

In a major change from today's outdoor protocol, we cut (chopped) down the trees that we used near our campsite and lashed this thing together during lulls in the storm. I've attempted to identify all the boys in the picture but the memory fog of nearly 65 years fails me some.

Finally on Friday the weather cleared, and things began to dry out. We had been soaked most of the week. The Camp Orr Road was clogged with downed timber and the National Guard was called in to clear it. That afternoon, my dad, not yet the Troop 102 scoutmaster, made it down the road and took the tower picture.

The last night we were able to have the closing campfire, complete with a "Poncho's Secret Papers" skit and a chilling telling of "Smokey Joe" by the inimitable Pat Bolin, camp director and district scouter.

On Saturday we headed for home, but no one who was there will forget the great storm of 1959 and the National Guard clearing the road. It was the first of my years as a camper and staff member at Camp Orr, a large influence on my life.

Sadly, Martin Butt survived serving as a marine in Vietnam, returned to Fayetteville, married and died tragically in an automobile accident at a way-to-young age.



Troop 102 Tower Photo by Roger Widder

Bottom from left: Raymond White, Dr. Wayne White.

2nd row left: James Moran, Thomas, Charles White

3rd row left: Kern Jackson, Giles Penick, David Widder

4th:
unknown

Top: Martin Butt



BLUFF LINES



MEMORIES OF UNCLE FRANK LEWIS

[please submit your own memories to continue this necessarily incomplete report of a wonderful life in scouting,] Jack Butt, Camper 1961-1964, staff 1965-1966

From its beginning in the mid 1950's, until Uncle Frank Lewis passed on many years later, and even now, Camp Orr and Uncle Frank Lewis are often mentioned in the same breath. He is an iconic legend of the Council, whom I knew well during my scouting years. The statements of this first paragraph rely only on information written or told elsewhere for these particular facts: Frank B. Lewis formed Fayetteville's Troop 102 in 1918 and served as its initial scoutmaster, even before Westark Area Council was chartered by the Boy Scouts of America. The initial trips in the early 1950's to seek, find, and select the Camp Orr property for acquisition by Westark Council for its permanent summer camp involved Council Executive Pat Bolin, benefactor Raymond Orr, and Frank B. Lewis. By the time I became a Boy Scout in 1961, for these reasons and more, he was already an iconic, living scouting legend in Westark Area Council.

From this point on, are my personal memories of Uncle Frank, mixed with those of other scouts I knew and who, as I, enjoyed personally and directly the benefits Uncle Frank's contribution to Westark Council Scouting and Camp Orr.

By the time I met Uncle Frank around 1961 he was by my standards an elderly gentleman. He would have been in his mid to late 60's, my grandparents' age. Uncle Frank would drop by our Troop 102 meetings randomly and be recognized and seemed to have some kind of business there – perhaps he was on the Troop Committee, or a commissioner – at 11 years old a new Tenderfoot doesn't pay much attention to those things; but as I grew older, I learned he was an available, active, and interesting merit badge counselor. Uncle Frank was always around at the District Camporees, and when he showed up at a scouting event, be it troop meeting, camporee,

or staff at Camp Orr, he was always in proper uniform. But I do remember this: his shoes were ankle high, brown, leather lace-ups – something that hadn't been in style in my short lifetime. And if it was at an outdoor event, he had leather, strap-on puttees, as were worn by the military in World War I and less so in World War II. But given that he had come of age as a scout leader in 1918, these were comfortable, serviceable, and in-style items of garb for him. I only have two pictures of



him, but found this picture in Clip Art, which very closely approximates Uncle Frank's footwear and puttee style.

You knew when Uncle Frank was coming, and where he was, because he always drove a very old, battered, panel truck, I'm guessing about 1940 vintage - it looked almost exactly like this

clip art example, except its paint job and body condition were considerably more fatigued than the one pictured. At camporees, and for the several weeks he lived at Camp Orr each summer, and when he from time to time would take older scouts camping or bowhunting, he lived/slept in his van – not a tent or cabin.

It was, I guess, an early iteration of a VW Kampervan, Sprinter Van, or Mini-Winnebago, EXCEPT,



the interior of it looked as dark, unfinished, cluttered and foreboding as a gypsy's wagon – it was NOT a handily engineered effort of impressive, efficient, and aesthetic living space. But he could draw from its depths as needed, bows and arrows - and tools and materials to make and repair them - camping and cooking gear, first aid supplies, an overcoat or raincoat, or whatever else may be needed at the time.

Bob Fairchild, a Scout in Fayetteville's Troop 100 beginning about 1955, recalls catching a ride with Uncle Frank to Camp Orr for a staff summer. Uncle Frank was glad to give him a ride, but Bob discovered when he got picked up, that the only seat in the truck was the driver's seat and Bob had to perch on his duffel bag for the 2.5 hour, mostly-over-bumpy-gravel-road trek to Camp Orr.

Uncle Frank ran the archery range at Camp Orr. He was always assigned one junior staffer as his assistant. In my two years on staff, that was Keith Faulkner of Fayetteville (1965), followed by Don Crump of Ft. Smith (1966). Uncle Frank was very business-like, and while I remember him as cordial and friendly, I don't remember him smiling much, much less laughing. He had a lot of work to do, with a lot of ADHD knuckle-headed preteens and teens, and he got it done, and to my best knowledge without an arrow ever going into or through anyone. He must have run thousands of scouts through his archery range, and probably more than a thousand through



BLUFF LINES



the Archery Merit Badge. He fletched all of his own arrows, which given the volume of shots on his range in a summer, is astonishing!

When there was not a doctor in camp (which was more often than not during my years) he was in charge of the dispensary and taught First Aid. In addition to being my Archery and First Aid Merit Badge Counselor, he was also my Camping Merit Badge Counselor, and there was absolutely nothing that he didn't know about campcraft and scoutcraft. While I am sure I learned a lot from him, I specifically remember his asking me how I was going to stay warm sleeping on a cold night camping. A sleeping bag or course, with extra covers if needed. "How about the part of you against the ground?" Well, I said, the ground would keep that part warm. "Well, not if the ground is colder than the air, and you've compressed your sleeping bag against the ground, you've lost all of its insulating benefit and you'll shiver all night long," which I discovered by experience later on was absolutely true. "If you can't afford an air mattress (and we camped on nickels and dimes made from paper routes and mowing lawns, so our camping gear was minimal), take a stack of newspapers, they are excellent insulation laid out under you." Who'd have thunk of that, except a guy who had been camping for over half a century, during the depression when money to buy camping gear didn't exist, before he imparted this wisdom to me!?

His service and work epitomized the Scout Law, Oath and Motto.

This is certainly only a small piece of Uncle Frank's story – I hope it incites your memory to send in your recollections to honor Uncle Frank's legacy to this Council.

The image shows three merit badge application forms. The first is for the Camping Merit badge, signed by Frank B. Lewis on 7/16/63. The second is for the Archery Merit badge, also signed by Frank B. Lewis on 7/16/66. The third is for the First Aid Merit badge, signed by Frank B. Lewis on 2/16/63. Each form includes a 'COUNCIL RECORD' section with checkboxes for 'Certificate issued' and 'Badge delivered', and a note at the bottom stating 'APPLICANT WILL TURN IN THIS PORTION TO HIS UNIT LEADER FOR RECORD POSTING AND FOR FORWARDING TO COUNCIL OFFICE WITH ORDER FOR AWARD.'



Uncle Frank at Camp Orr Archery Range demonstrating good archery form to Troop 102 Scouts Stephen Widder and Charles Thorn, circa 1965.

CAMP ORR AND HIGH ADVENTURE BASED UPDATE: SUMMER 2024

The camp weeks are up 33 % from 3 weeks of campers last summer, to 4 weeks this summer. Registrations are already equal to the number of campers last year, with troops still registering.

Camp Director Mike Boness reports:

Staff hiring is ongoing, we are still in need of the following staff:

Program Director/Aquatics Director/Shooting Sports Director/Ecology Director/Scoutcraft Director-these positions will require National Camp School training.

NCS is scheduled for May 11-17.

Additional staff needed: Dining Hall staff/Cycling Merit Badge Counselor/Climbing staff/Citizenship Merit Badge counselor.

If interested, contact Mike Boness at mfbscouter@yahoo.com.

Please remember, the Camp Orr Alumni Association will grow and thrive based solely on your input of stories, pictures, and additional contacts. Please submit ideas, stories, pictures and comments to Maribeth Harris jersey_burn@hotmail.com

Until the next newsletter, yours in Scouting!

Jack Butt, chair jbutt@dbtcfirm.com

Maribeth Harris jersey_burn@hotmail.com

Bryan West dominosnorth@hotmail.com

Billy Williams, *ex officio*, Camp Ranger

Mike Boness *ex officio*, Camp director