



BLUFF LINES



Fifth Edition, June, 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 fifth quarterly Bluff Lines. Check in frequently and add informally on our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CampOrrAlumniAssociation>



Troop 102, waiting to raise (lower?) the colors, 1969, and have chow!

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.

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The Boys of Summer: 1955, Camp Orr's first campers

[as collated from the memories of 6 childhood friends, now 80 years old, who attended the originating session of Camp Orr in 1955 and joined a Zoom conference 69 years later to recall that special experience.]

John Backus, Tom Butt, George Faucette, Jay McDonald, Togar White and Charles White, all born in 1944 just before the baby boomer generation and before World War II had even concluded, grew up as childhood friends in Fayetteville, turned eleven in 1955, and joined Fayetteville's Troop 102, becoming part of the elite group of very first Scouts, among tens of thousands following, to camp at the Council's just acquired Camp Orr on the Buffalo River. This is what they remember.

First, it was a big deal; it made the headlines of Fayetteville's daily newspaper.

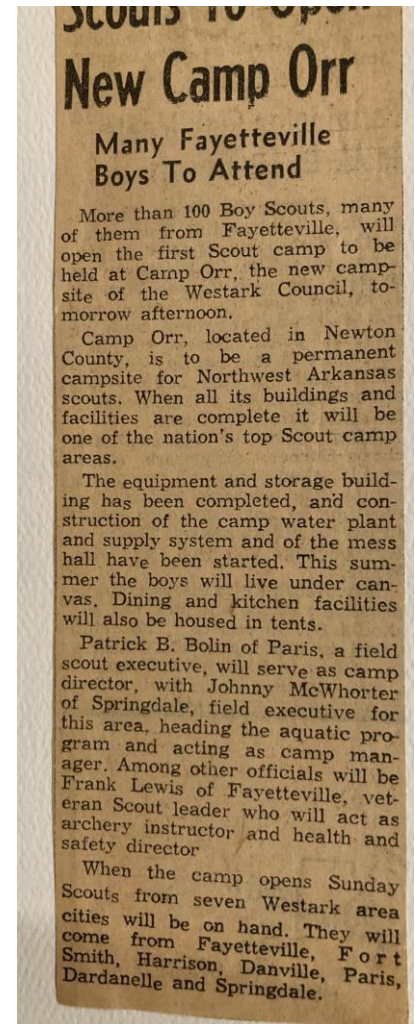
Memories diverge as to the first trip down the Hill; some recall that for the first year at least, maybe two, the road into Orr was so primitive that parents' and scout leaders' passenger cars didn't even attempt the descent into Camp Orr. That was provided by the Harrison National Guard unit and their deuce and a half army trucks, leaving parents and their vehicles atop Mount Sherman. Others recall that such National Guard assistance only occurred as the result of heavy rains. But in any event, it took the U.S. Army to get the early campers there! Getting to Mount Sherman coming from Fayetteville was itself no cake walk – East from Huntsville along what is now U.S. 412, you turned right onto dirt Highway 21, thence to Kingston, thence to Boxley, thence to Ponca, thence to Mt. Sherman – 32 miles of steep, curvy, rough, muddy or dusty, dirt road just to get to the top of the Camp Orr hill. Most cars in those days didn't have air conditioning, so it was windows up and down to either catch the breeze or keep the dust of passing cars out.



For true Tenderfeet, this was real camping. John Backus, who turned 11 at camp, was designated as "Pogo", a title reserved for the youngest camper at camp.

At left is John Backus on an early Scout outing to White River; at Camp Orr in 1955, he was "Pogo", the youngest camper there.

The Buffalo River was not then a National River. It was a very remote, thinly settled area, all privately owned by rural farmers, many of whom had abandoned their rustic homesteads to get closer to civilization. A week or month could pass at Camp Orr without anyone floating by the camp; the Buffalo River Trails and their hikers and horses did not then exist; and Twin Falls was still considered somewhat of a secret by the Scout campers, never, ever being visited by anyone except Boy Scouts and known



simply as “The Waterfall”. Upriver, the Steel Creek put-in was a private horse ranch, and Kyle’s landing was an unnamed, deserted farm, still 10 years in the future from being known as “Kyles”, when a Texas entrepreneur would seek to establish a boys’ ranch there for wayward boys, named after his deceased son, Kyle. It was as close as one could get in Arkansas, if not the U.S., to being the heart of uninhabited wilderness..

Upon entering Camp after crossing the Waterfall’s Shop Creek at the bottom of the hill, the Caretaker’s house (it was “Caretaker” then, not “Ranger”) was immediately on the right, an old, white, clapboard, simple Victorian farmhouse. That was replaced sometime in the 1970’s or 80’s with the present Ranger’s house across the road from the original house. In 1955, the Caretaker either actively farmed the bottomland field or rented to someone who did, planting it with corn and other crops, as well as grazing livestock. Occasionally it would be plowed, and the Scouts could find lots of flint chips, and sometimes a full arrowhead in the freshly turned dirt.

The Troop 102 scoutmasters were Bob Jones, then principal of Washington Elementary School and Lavon Smith, shop teacher at Fayetteville Jr. High. Both were respected and liked by the boys. Bob, a Korean War veteran, when asked to tell about his war experiences noted that he had killed 40 men with one shot. The boys, amazed, asked “how?!” “I was in the artillery.” Probably not a politically correct topic of conversation now, but in a country that had just seen practically every man in the country who was now a father involved in World War II or the Korean war, and a society that lived through the media the realities of those wars, well, things were different then.

At right, Togar White fully uniformed and equipped for his first summer camp at Camp Orr’s first year, 1955.



Upon arrival at the camp, the Troop checked in, bringing their own Troop 102 tents, and led by a staff member into a seemingly random part of the unbroken woods, were told to clear and set up their campsite. They chopped and chopped and chopped with their lightweight Boy Scout hatchets, trying to clear enough saplings and brush to make room for their tents. No tent platforms existed.

No latrines, privies or toilets existed. Per pictured instructions in their Scout Handbooks, the Troop dug a pit latrine, simply a three foot long, one foot wide, and two feet deep ditch, the toilet paper left jauntily on a stake or cut off sapling within convenient reach, if properly completed with an empty tin can over it to keep it dry in the rain, The pile of dirt from the pit was equipped with the folding army shovel (“entrenching tool”) which had dug the hole, stuck in it to be handy to provide from the dirt pile a “flush” of dirt to cover whatever deposit one might make in the latrine. The latrine was dug to, and did, last the entire week before being filled in at departure.

Though the mess hall was either built or under construction, all meals were served in huge Army tents pitched just in the field at the bottom of the hill. In the category of things that haven’t changed, the Scout Campers of 1955 recall that the food was not that wonderful, but by the time mealtimes rolled around, all the activity had created sufficient hunger that the servings were hugely appreciated and totally consumed.

There were no shower facilities, that was taken care of by the frequent trips to the swimming hole, and if the River was so high that the waterfront was closed, then it was a tongue-bitingly cold shower at the Waterfall...in birthday suits. Again, many societal and political things have changed since then.

Camp activities have changed little. The day began with flag-raising and “To the Colors” before breakfast. Mornings were filled with scheduled activities to earn rank and merit badges; the afternoons had free time to go back to favorite places (waterfront, archery, crafts, etc.) or take short Troop hikes: Mud Cave, Copperhead

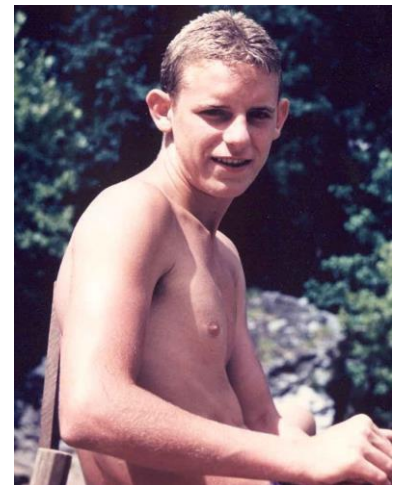
Cave, the Waterfall, Hemmed in Hollow, the Wilderness Library, Signal Pine. Caves, now closed to preserve bats, were open venues for adventure; but the climbing program was decades into the future, and venturing onto the bluffs was not in anyone's playbook.

The iconic Pat Bolin, then a Westark District Executive, was the beloved Camp Director for the first several years. Uncle Frank Lewis was there from the beginning, working out of his ancient, panel delivery truck, which seemed to have every kind of supply or spare part one would need for anything, running the archery range, counseling the First Aid Merit Badge, and serving as the Camp medical staff if a volunteer doctor or nurse was not on board.

Dangers and scary near misses? A couple of the guys came down with terrible, nearly camp-ending poison ivy. Tom Butt led Charles White on a climb up the ledges at the Waterfall, and reaching for an unseen handhold over his head, grabbed a snake, which he promptly released without prejudice to Tom or the snake. During one long rainy spell, the waterfront was generally closed due to the high and fast water, but they opened it briefly so scouts needing certain swim requirements could get them. The Scouts jumped in at the waterfront, but by the time they had swum the requirement, the river had washed them a quarter mile downstream where they had to climb out and hike back to the waterfront.

The closing Campfires were held at what is now called Vesper Point. Interestingly, none of the "boys" recall the story of Smokey Joe being told the first couple of years.

All of these young Scouts returned to Camp Orr with Troop 102 as campers the next year or two, and most became junior staffers for a year or two. George Faucette assisted Uncle Frank on the archery range for one year, and the next was the camp quartermaster; Tom Butt worked at the snack bar/trading post, and then waterfront lifeguard (see picture at right), and John Backus worked on the waterfront. Charles White became an All-State band trumpeter and as his years at camp increased, he served as the camp bugler: Reveille, Assembly, Mess Call, To the Colors, and Taps, played at apt times of day. Quarters were improved: as junior staff, they had tent platforms and cots with mattresses. On the short weekend, the senior staff would load the junior staff into the camp jeeps, or maybe a flatbed truck, and drive to Jasper for dinner and a movie. Tom Butt remembers being commandeered by Pat Bolin, to load several bottles of Clorox into a jeep and driving up to the water tank where, implementing the Camp water treatment program, they simply dumped the Clorox into the tank which had been pumped full of Buffalo River water. At right, Tom Butt as waterfront lifeguard.



The gang pretty much hung together until their mid-teens, becoming Explorer Scouts. Pictured below is their 102 Explorer Post departing for a fishing trip to Bull Shoals; of the original six campers to Camp Orr, Jay McDonald, Charles White, Tom Butt, Jon Backus and George Faucette are in this group.

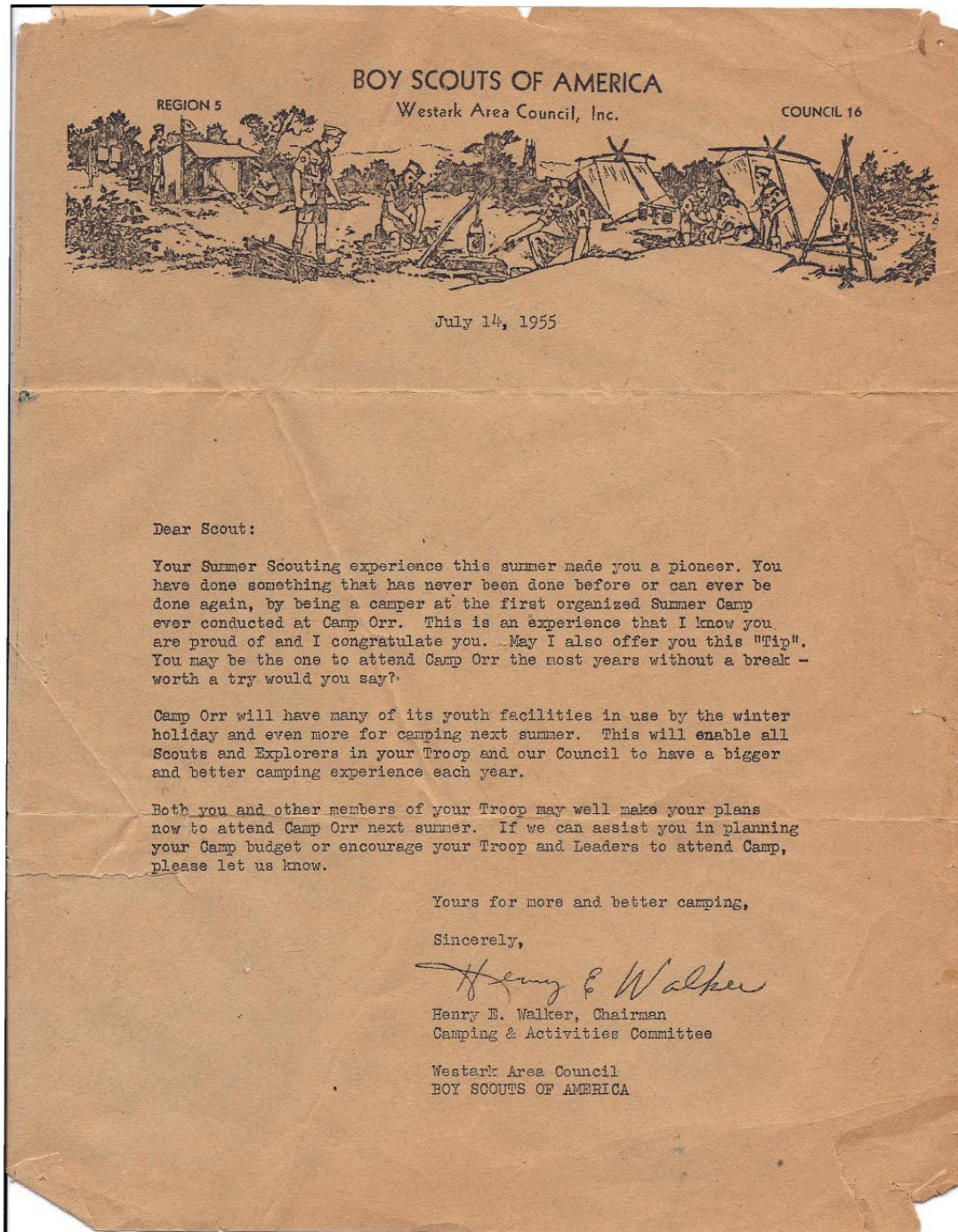


As many scouts and leaders would understand, by their mid-teens, girls, sports, and cars created irresistible distractions that concluded their scouting and Camp Orr days. All of them reached Star or Life rank, but only George Faucette achieved Eagle, earning that at age 14 and before succumbing to the

overwhelming distractions of the later teenage years.

In the fullness of life they became husbands, fathers, and grandfathers; a Ph.D. university professor, the principal of a major architecture firm, the co-owner of the largest real estate agency in Northwest Arkansas, a career soldier, and an Ophthalmologist. Now at 80, they remain close friends, stay in touch with each other, and still describe their Camp Orr years as "a magical experience we looked forward to every summer."

Below is the letter each received and treasured as evidence of their unique experience, as the vanguard of tens of thousands of scouts, each of whom has a special place in their heart for Camp Orr.



Save the Shed!!

Across the entry road from the present Camp Ranger's house sits a small, well built, squared log, dove-tail-notched, log cabin with wooden shake roof. It's pictured below:



We know nothing about it, except that its construction proves it was built by a skilled and careful mountaineer craftsman, well before Camp Orr was Camp Orr, and well before any other existing structure existed at Camp Orr.

Billy Williams, the Camp Ranger for many years, calls it the Smoke House, simply because its size suggests that. I do not recall it at all from my camp and staff days in the 1960's; though I am sure it was there, it would have sat next to, and been very diminutive in comparison with the original caretaker's house, then on the north side of the entry road, across from the present Ranger's house.

It has been used over the years to store stuff that probably would have been thrown away if there weren't space to store it. The inside is full of trash and debris; windows, doors, and floor are seriously deteriorated. A storm a year or two ago took down the ancient and failing roof.

If the roof isn't replaced soon, despite its solid construction, it will rot to the ground in the next couple of years and not be there, much less restorable.

Benefactors have pledged to provide the materials to re-roof it and in that process clear it of debris and junk, simply to preserve it for the time necessary to determine what to do with it, and whether and how to repair its other failings and re-purpose it. Any historical significance, other than it is an excellent example of early Ozark construction methods, is yet to be determined.

One possibility is that spiffed up, it might make a very appealing and appropriate welcoming station, a check-in cabin, where Camp Staff could station themselves in a truly Ozark setting, to welcome and guide troops and their campers as they come through the entrance, to a truly Ozark Paradise.

What's the point? We've got the materials to preserve this structure. It's a really cool structure and even if it isn't assigned a use, it is the oldest building at Camp Orr, adds an air of mountaineer authenticity to the Camp and is worth preserving. We need 1) some bodies to participate in a one-day roof replacement and clean out; and 2) any knowledge or speculation you may have about the origin or use of the smokehouse. Please email me with your interest! Thanks, Jack Butt (jbutt@dbtcfirm.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!

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Billy Williams, *ex officio*, Camp Ranger

Mike Boness *ex officio*, Camp director

A poster for the Camp Orr Alumni Reunion Weekend. The top half features the title "Camp Orr Alumni Reunion Weekend" in a white, stylized font against a dark background. Below the title is a photograph of four people standing around a large bonfire at night, holding torches. The bottom half of the poster contains text in white. It specifies the dates "October 18-20, 2024", states that all alumni over 18 are welcome, and provides information on where to find more details (Facebook page or website). It also includes contact information for Maribeth Harris Graham and a call to action for registration.

**Camp Orr Alumni
Reunion Weekend**

October 18-20, 2024

All Alumni (>18Y old) are welcome to attend!
Find more information on the Camp Orr Alumni
Association Facebook page or Natural State Council
website.

Questions? Email MariBeth Harris Graham at
Jersey_Burn@hotmail.com

REGISTRATION OPEN NOW!