



# BLUFF LINES

Tenth Edition, Summer 2025



*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.*

Greetings, alumni and friends, from the summer enhanced beauty of the Ozarks as we publish this Tenth Edition of Bluff Lines. **Mark your calendars for an alumni weekend reunion at Camp Orr, October 17-19, 2025**

*Our membership requirements 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 its a snippet or snapshot; 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. Check in frequently and add informally to our Facebook page:*

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CampOrrAlumniAssociation>.

## **In this Edition:**

A TRIBUTE TO JOE CLAY

YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN

THE SWIMMING HOLE

FALL REUNION

CAMP ORR SUMMER REVIEW

## ***A TRIBUTE TO JOE CLAY, AN EXTRAORDINARY CAMP ORR ALUMNUS***

***By Jack Butt (Camp Orr Camper, 1961-64, junior staff 1965-66) and Tom McKinney (Camper 1965-68, "no dollar" Dining Hall Steward 1969, Trading Post Manager 1970, Waterfront Director 1978-1979)***

[In researching the Bluff Lines Article on the Living History cabin and program at Camp Orr, Joe Clay's name arose in several contexts as instrumental. I'd known Joe Clay for one staff summer at Camp Orr, 60 years ago, and but for a vague memory, lost track of him. Curiosity piqued research which led to this article, which I hope those of you who knew Joe in scouting will find gratifying.  
– JB]

[Those of us who worked at Camp Orr in the 1960's and 1970's were introduced to one of the most memorable men that we had ever met – Joe Clay. This 6'4" 250 lb. blonde-haired, blue-eyed Marine made an immediate impression on you.

He had a larger-than-life commanding presence and a no-nonsense attitude that was tailored and directed toward working with Scouts, both young and old. He had a booming voice that could be heard all over Camp Orr when directions for a project needed to be communicated to a large number of Scouts. That voice would then be transformed into a beautiful Tenor when singing Scout songs and hymns and then later, at the Friday night campfire, would transform again into a calm, mysterious and haunting voice when relating the story of “Smokey Joe” to an enthralled group of Scouts.

Joe Clay was dedicated to Scouting. His time at Camp Orr and in the Westark Area Council and the Razorback District resulted in some of the most significant activities and programs whose effects lasted years after Joe had moved on with his Scouting career. He started the Scouting Expo program that helped recruit new Scouts for the Council. He energized the Order of the Arrow program with new leadership and increased their activities and enlarged its dance team. Joe’s long history of both working at Camp Orr as a Scout but especially as a professional, improved and diversified its programs. Though it has been fifty-five years since Joe last worked at Camp Orr, his memory is still strong in many of us and I hope this article will not only remind those of us who knew Joe of his contributions to Scouting and Camp Orr but that it may also introduce him to other generations of Camp Orr staff alumni who never had the opportunity to know or work with him. -TM]



Joe Clay was born in Washington D.C. in 1945 and raised solely by his mother. In 1957, he became a Cub Scout in Pack 48, Peabody Elementary School, in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, where his mother was the Den mother. Joe was proud of being the Denner and liked being a Cub Scout because he thought the uniforms looked like U.S. Cavalry! He continued his Cub Scouting when they moved to Long Beach, California, becoming in due course a Boy Scout in Troop 7, First Church of the Brethren in Long Beach, where Joe remembered the minister was Bob Richards, a then famous Olympic gold medalist.

Moving back to Ft. Smith, Joe joined Troop 7, Southside Baptist Church where Joe Yoke was the Scoutmaster and became Joe Clay’s

mentor and lifelong friend. While with Troop 7, Joe served as Patrol Leader, Senior Patrol Leader, Junior Assistant Scoutmaster, Scoutmaster, and practically every other troop office position

By his own admission, Joe as a young teen was a very poor student and not ambitious about scout ranks; and he got into a fair amount of serious trouble. Only the intervention in court of his scoutmasters Joe Yoke and Perry Henson, and Westark Area Council Executive L.M.R. "Mac" Rogers, saved Joe from serious charges. Joe credited this intervention and scouting as saving his life, creating a debt of gratitude that he spent the rest of his life trying to repay.

Joe moved on as an Explorer Scout to Ft. Smith's very active Explorer Post 15, First Christian Church, that he characterized as a "Super Scout Post". Every scout in the Post except Joe was an Eagle Scout, and the Scoutmaster, Thad Bynum was an electrical engineer and National Guard F84 pilot. The Post was given a great many serious tasks and assignments by their Scoutmaster Bynum, and by the Council Executive, Mac Rogers, challenging them with important responsibilities from setting up camporees, to working as a disaster team, to serving as camp staff. Ultimately Joe rose to be the Post President.

Joe claims his first staff job at Camp Orr was as a dishwasher in the kitchen at age 12, which would have been 1957, Camp Orr's third year of operation. His attendance and service at Camp Orr was such that he characterized his teen years as growing up at Camp Orr. Over the years, Joe progressed from Dishwasher to Dining Hall Steward, to Quartermaster, to Camp Commissioner/Medic /Ranger, Merit Badge Instructor, Assistant to Uncle Frank Lewis, Water Safety Instructor, and ultimately Program Director. He worked closely with Camp Orr founder, early Camp Director and icon Pat Bolin, whom Joe recalled, "beat me into submission" until Joe made Eagle Scout.

Finishing high school in around 1962, Joe enlisted and served five years in the United States Marine Corps, earning the rank of Sergeant and working as an Intelligence Section Chief.

During his Marine Corps tenure, each year Joe saved up his annual leave, so he could return to work on the Camp Orr summer camp staff. Though Joe was offered a commission as a Marine Corps officer, he turned that down to return to college, because his goal was to become a District Scout Executive, which required a college degree.

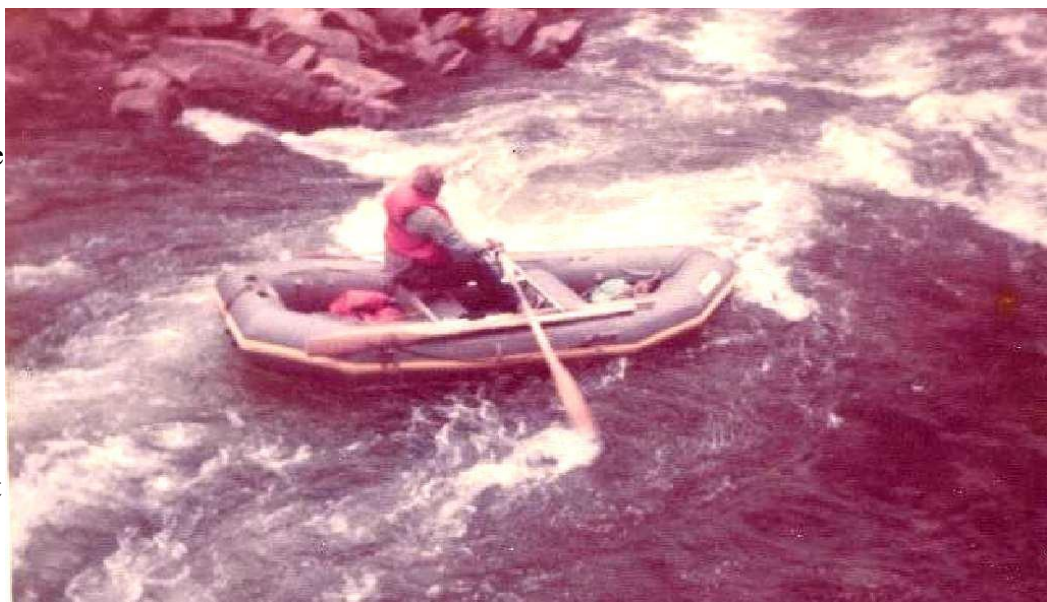
Joe was a big, broad-shouldered guy, with a big, engaging personality and smile, but forceful when focused on the success of Scouting. He was hard to stop, once he took a task; Westark Council President Bill Morton characterized Joe as "runaway bulldozer", and Bill was just waiting to see how long it would take for him to crash and burn...but he never did.

Upon enrolling at the University of Arkansas around 1967, Joe sought to become involved with the Alpha Phi Omega Scout affiliated service fraternity. He located Joe Spotts, an APO alumnus, but together they could not find any activities or members of the University of Arkansas' Beta Rho Chapter. They discovered that

the fraternity was, for all practical purposes, extinct. Joe and Jim confronted the Westark Area Council leadership with this void of Scouting presence which resulted in Spotts becoming a District Commissioner and Alpha Phi Rho chapter advisor. Joe and Jim together revitalized the Beta Rho chapter to the extent that it became, over time, the #2 chapter in the United States. Joe also served as the Pledge Master, Sectional Representative and eventually President of the chapter. Based on his prior experience and service, Joe was also commissioned to start an Explorer Post...all so that the Uark (later Razorback) District could have support for their camporees.

Joe founded Explorer Post 200, First Presbyterian Church, in Fayetteville and became its Adult Advisor. He recruited Scouts from Fayetteville's Troop 77 and Troop 102 and was described by him as a Post filled with the greatest bunch of kids he'd ever worked with, "all of them stars." Among them was a National Vice President of Explorers (Curt Rom) and the longest serving Director of Program at the Philmont Scout Ranch and Explorer Base in northeastern New Mexico (Mark Anderson). Joe later described Mark as "like a brother to me" and Mark's parents basically "adopted" Joe into their family. Post 200 also provided more than twenty other members who worked at Philmont over the years as well as numerous Order of the Arrow officers at the national level. That morphed the OA chapter for Westark into a more active group, of which Joe became the Lodge Advisor. The success of Post 200 inspired other Posts to spring from local Fayetteville troops including Troops 100, 101, and 105

In 1971 Joe took the position of Headquarters Program Director at Philmont and in 1972 advanced to Associate Director of Program. While serving in that position he launched many of the popular backcountry interpretative programs still offered at Philmont. Joe related that "Some of the staffed camps were experimenting with living history programs on their own and without permission. I had the choice of either telling them to stop those activities and put their uniforms back on or I could choose to continue them and include them in our backcountry programs. Upon seeing how popular they were with the Scouts I saw that I really only had one choice, and I made it." The interpretive living history program at Philmont is now the largest such operation in the United States, exceeding anything even the National Park Service offers. The next summer, Joe reunited with Tim Osborn, one of his



explorers from Westark Council's Explorer Post 200, at a national Order of the Arrow event, and inspired Tim to bring a Living History Program to Camp Orr. Tim successfully did that, where it ran for some 20 years (see article in Spring 2025 Bluff Lines).

In 2010, Joe received the Silver Sage Award from the Philmont Staff Association for distinguished and exceptional personal service of an important and lasting nature for Philmont Scout Ranch. As well as serving as the Headquarters Program Director, Coordinator of Program Operations, and Philmont's River Assault Group. Joe also hike Philmont four times as an Adult Crew Advisor. Joe later served for many years as the Director of the San Isabel Scout Ranch of the Rocky Mountain Council in Colorado and established its high adventure base. He also served on the Executive Board of the Rocky Mountain Council.

From 1978 to 1995, Joe served with the La Junta, Colorado Police Department, reaching the position of Assistant Chief and taught at Otero Junior College's Law Enforcement Academy. Then, in great part to preserve the youth Indian dance program, he took the job of Program Director of Koshare Indian Museum in Pueblo Colorado from 1995 to 2002.

Joe died in La Junta, Colorado on May 22, 2011, at the age of 66 from complications of diabetes and other health issues. He was a truly great Scouter and Camp Orr Alumnus.

Joe was remembered at his funeral as an adventurer, leader, youth advocate and father figure for many. He influenced the lives of hundreds of youths, starting with Explorer Post 200 in Fayetteville in the 1960's, and decades thereafter for those youth who attended Philmont Scout Ranch, grew up in the Arkansas Valley of Colorado or attended the San Isabel Scout Ranch.

Mark Anderson, mentored by Joe as a member of Fayetteville's Explorer Post 200, then later as a Camp Orr Staff member, and yet later as Philmont Staff, who himself went on to be the longest serving Director of Program at Philmont, recalls that Joe taught him: "Never be satisfied. Always think about change. Always think about new things." Mark said Joe, "was a great inspiration to taking the outside to its fullest, getting people to really push it as far as they can."

Joe never married or fathered any children, but is remembered by his adopted son, Terrencio Franco-Neto, who lived with Joe as a high school exchange student in 1996 and later as a college student, "he raised so many kids and so many people looked to Joe as a father figure... He always encouraged



kids to succeed on their own. It was said for a man who never had children of his own, Joe Clay raised a lot of sons.”

And Joe in his own words: “As I finally grew up, the Scout Oath and Law became the guiding principles of my life for the last 60 years. The skills I learned as a Scout havestayed with me, and many times have literally saved my life and helped me save the lives of others.”

“Making Eagle Scout was the easy part - the hard part is living as an Eagle Scout the rest of your life.”

Joe also quoted Forest Witcraft, Executive Editor of the Scouting Magazine from 1950 to 1958, “A hundred years from now, it will not matter what



sort of house I lived in, nor what kind of car I drove, nor how much money I had in the bank. What will matter is that I was important in the life of a boy”.

Camp Orr and Scouting raised Joe Clay; and Joe Clay in turn invested his life to the goodness of scouting and all the boys he served through scouting. Rest in Peace, Joe. Camp Orr remembers. ***If you have memories of or tributes to Joe Clay, please post them to the Camp Orr Alumni Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CampOrrAlumniAssociation/>***



## ***CAMP ORR... YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN!***

Jack Butt, camper 1961-1964, staff 1965-1966, Provisional Scoutmaster 2025

Among the lauded works of a famous novelist from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Wolfe, was his work, *You Can't Go Home Again*, which properly described the plot, and includes the main character's quote, "You can never go home again." The plot revolves around the main character finding that circumstances had changed so much between the town of his beloved upbringing and his return years later as an adult, the "home" of his heart no longer existed. It has become a line that many people use to describe how their growing-up home and they have changed, such that the magic is no longer there to return to.

I just took a trip "home", and you can indeed go home again. Like presumably all of the members of this Camp Orr Alumni Association, my years at Camp Orr as a camper and staff in the 1960's are among my most cherished. I presumed that those days were gone. Camp Orr is certainly there, but I'd long since concluded that the activities, experiences, feelings, and spirit of that wonderful place as a scout probably could not be re-created at my age and stage. Most happily, I was wrong!

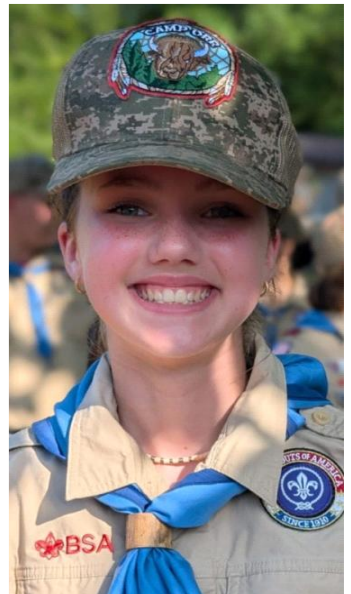
It started as I learned with pleasure that all my four grandchildren, two in Washington D.C. and two in Dallas, two boys, two girls, were in Scouting. Last winter, discussing their summer plans, I learned that they wanted to go to scout camp, but were not enamored with the camps scheduled for their troops. I proposed, having no idea of its real possibilities, that I form them into a provisional troop and take them to Camp Orr. To my surprise, they were quite eager to pursue that.

To make a long story short, with much support from the Council, adopting such a project as my "ticket" to earn my Wood Badge, and hundreds of emails, telephone calls, and arrangements later, I found myself gathered at the top of Mt. Sherman on June 15, 2025 as the Scoutmaster of 19 scouts and four other adult volunteers from 6 troops, from 4 states and the District of Columbia, as a provisional troop poised to take the daunting drive down the Camp Orr hill for a week at Scout Camp.

I remember as a young teenager, in a Sunday School class discussing the meaning of Christmas, that the teacher confirmed that we no longer believed in Santa Claus and with that, a lot of the wonder, joy and excitement had gone out of opening packages on Christmas. The teacher admonished us not to worry; that when we grew up and had our own children, we would experience that same wonder, joy and excitement watching our own children, believing in Santa Claus, open their packages. In the fullness of time, I discovered that it was true, with my children, and again, with my grandchildren.

As a scoutmaster, this summer, I had the same joy I had as a scout and staffer, watching the nineteen scouts (13 boys, 6 girls) of the provisional troop soak in the adventure, fun, beauty, and wonderful outdoor experiences of Camp Orr. At the end of Camp, I declared truthfully to the Troop that indeed, I'd had more fun than any of them. I did not hike to Antenna Pine, nor make the Mile Swim, but I urged those who wanted, to go; and delighted in hearing of their success when they finished. Twin Falls, Vesper Point, the grand campfire circle, skits and songs at mealtimes, all of the merit badges (my troop earned 38 *different* merit badges!), our troop's own campfires, hikes, fishing and swimming, Dutch oven cooking, the Order of the Arrow tap out, and yes, the campfire-ending telling of Smokey Joe, watching them soak all of that in, I did go home again for a week this past June to one of the best places in my heart and memory. What fun we had! A picture being worth a thousand words, the rest of this article is pictorial.

















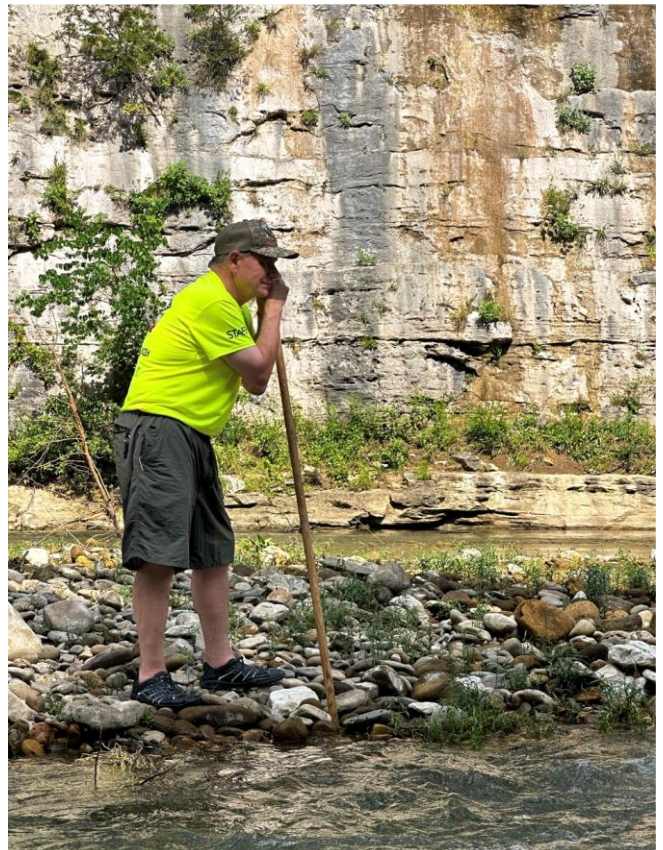








**SCOUT ON!**





***THE ICONIC SWIMMING HOLE ROCK...***



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***... 'NUF SAID.***





# **THE CAMP ORR ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**

**INVITES YOU TO THE THIRD ANNUAL REUNION WEEKEND**

**OCTOBER 17-19, 2025**

Join us for a weekend of Fun and Fellowship at Camp Orr! This weekend is for anyone over the age of 18 who has ever come to Camp Orr as a scout, adult leader, staff member or friend.

**To register, head to [www.naturalstatecouncil.org/Camporralumni2025](http://www.naturalstatecouncil.org/Camporralumni2025)**

Questions? Reach out to MariBeth Harris at [Jersey\\_Burn@hotmail.com](mailto:Jersey_Burn@hotmail.com)



Camp Orr had another great, growing, busy Camp year, here are some interesting statistics:

## MISSION STATEMENT

*The mission of Scouting America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.*

## SCOUT OATH

*On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.*

## SCOUT LAW

*A Scout is*

- Trustworthy
- Loyal
- Helpful
- Friendly
- Courteous
- Kind
- Obedient
- Cheerful
- Thrifty
- Brave
- Clean
- Reverent



## VISION

*Scouting America will prepare every eligible youth in America to become a responsible participating citizen and leader who is guided by the Scout Oath and Law.*



**Over 2,200**

Scouts continue to annually participate in program events at Camp Orr

## Continuing a Legacy

**7,600**

**YOUTH AND ADULT MEMBERS** are proudly served by Natural State Council, which includes Northwest, Northeast, Central, and Southeastern Arkansas



**39 weekends** per

year have **Camp Orr** bustling with Scouts and Volunteers from across the State of Arkansas and beyond. The other remaining weekends are filled with non-scout groups who rent our Mountain Treasure for their various programs



**130** young people earned the rank of **EAGLE SCOUT** in 2024

**\$100K+**

Has been invested in Camp Orr since Westark Area has merged together to form Natural State Council in 2023. These improvements were more than mission critical, and there is more to do!



**30%**

Is the anticipated increase for **Camp Orr Summer Camp Staff** salaries in 2026! We know to grow our program we must invest in our Camp Staff!



**1,009**

Scouts and Volunteers experienced **Camp Orr Summer Camp** in 2025, a 10% increase in participation over 2024.



**4,800**

hours of **VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY SERVICE** was performed by our Scouts at **Camp Orr** in 2024

**4** weeks of Summer Camp program plus 1 week of Staff Training annually occur at **Camp Orr** each summer with both in-council & out-of-council Scouts relying on this property for their summertime adventures





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](mailto:jersey_burn@hotmail.com).

Until the next newsletter, yours in Scouting!

Westark Camp Orr Alumni Committee:

Jack Butt, chair [jbutt@dbtcfirm.com](mailto:jbutt@dbtcfirm.com)

Maribeth Harris [jersey\\_burn@hotmail.com](mailto:jersey_burn@hotmail.com)

Bryan West [dominosnorth@hotmail.com](mailto:dominosnorth@hotmail.com)

Billy Williams, *ex officio*, Camp Ranger

Mike Boness *ex officio*, Camp director