



BLUFF LINES



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Seventh Edition, Fall 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 Seventh, "kinda" quarterly Bluff Lines.

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

View Approaching Camp Orr Gate



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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CAMP ORR ALUMNI REUNION 2024

We (The Alumni Committee) were successful in accomplishing the second annual Camp Orr Alumni Reunion on October 19, 2024. Early registrations indicated that last year's attendance of 35 + probably would not be matched, triggering a decision to not open and staff the Mess Hall for large group meals, and shorten the reunion to the single day with a picnic lunch. Several attendees opted to come in Friday night and camp in the available platform tents, and we started bright and early on Saturday morning with coffee and breakfast snacks at the entry gate, the location of our service project (see "Smokehouse" story in this issue). The weather was absolutely Indian summer Ozarks perfect for the event.

More than a dozen of us worked together throughout the morning getting the old Smokehouse re-roofed, providing ample opportunity for exchanging many memories of our camp experiences. The senior camper alumni who attended who was full of such shared memories was James Anderson, Orr camper 1958-61, Junior Staff 1962-66, Program Director, 1967, some of which memories also provide the fodder for another article in this issue.

We adjourned to the Order of the Arrow Hogan pavilion for a picnic lunch spread.

Fenn Wimberly, chief fire control officer with the Buffalo National River, and himself an Orr alumni, joined us at lunch, and updated and informed us on National Park Service issues, which summarized, advised that the growing Northwest Arkansas population, and regional and national popularity of the River was loving the River to death, and the Park Service was working diligently on a new strategic plan to carry it successfully into the next decades, dealing with issues of infrastructure, trash and sewage disposal, parking and boating resources. That process involves several calls for public comment, and if you have thoughts on the matter, you should

call the Park Service HQ to be listed for notification when those calls for input go out.

Fenn was followed by long time Camp Director Mike Boness updating us on the Camp and programs, noting that this summer's camp had extended to 4 weeks from the 3 weeks the summer before, with an increase to about 900 scouts and scouters, continuing the bounce back from the Covid years.

Left, Mike Boness updates on Camp Orr





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The afternoon began with a Dutch Oven cooking demonstration by three representatives of the Shiloh Museum of Ozark History who starting from scratch, cooked an incredible, 6 course dinner for the assembled group. Once the Dutch Ovens were doing their slow but steady work, some continued work on the Smokehouse roof, and others meandered about the Camp, re-connecting with memories.

We ended late afternoon with a wonderful early supper dished out in abundance from the array of Dutch

ovens. All agreed that those who missed this reunion would greatly regret their absence if they only knew what they were missing. We are scheduled to go again, October 17-19, 2025, with there being some movement to try a spring date, 2025. We'll let you know! Thanks for your interest, stay in touch on Facebook, and let us know if you want to write up some memories, or share them for us to write up: Jack Butt, jbutt@dbtcfirm.com; and Maribeth Harris, , Jersey_burn@hotmail.com.



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More on the Camp Orr Smokehouse...

A small informal gang of Orr Alumni gathered in September to start replacing the roof on the Smokehouse, the oldest (and probably least noticed) structure on Camp Orr, before it collapsed from exposure to the elements. The report on that is on the Camp Orr Alumni Facebook page. At the just concluded reunion, the Alumni completed the roofing, hopefully preserving the structure well into the future.

Posts about the “Smokehouse” at Camp Orr on its Alumni Association Facebook page opened an historical door. Earl Raney, born in 1938, now 86 years young replied by comment to the post that he had eaten some fine pork out of that smokehouse as a child. We tracked Earl down. Living now in Ohio with his daughter, he was pleased to chat about his memories.

His family had deep roots in the Buffalo River valley: his great, great, great grandfather, an Arbaugh, along with the Raney’s and the Villines were the hunters and trappers that migrated in and homesteaded as the first white settlers in the Buffalo River Valley in the early 1800’s.

While Earl wasn’t born on the farmstead that became Camp Orr, Raney Cove, the deep hollow that runs from the river all the way up to Mount Sherman, being the precipitous drop off to the right/east as you head down the Camp road, was settled by and named for his family: his great grandfather Harv Raney raised 13 children on the hillside running from Mt. Sherman down to Camp Orr. Earl was born and lived his first few years on Mt. Sherman. During World War II, when Earl was a small child, his father was called to military service and Earl’s mother, being without a man about the house, moved with Earl in May 1943 down the mountain to what is now Camp Orr, to be closer to her parents (and Earl’s grandparents) Walter and Sarah Arbaugh. Earl’s three uncles, who had been living at home in the Arbaugh house, were also called to the service during World War II.

As one enters Camp Orr, the Arbaugh house sat on the north/right side of the entry road, just across from the present Ranger’s house on the left/south side of the road. The original Arbaugh house was a white, clapboard, simple Victorian style farmhouse with a large front porch and steep roof which covered a stand-up attic suitable for sleeping quarters. It sat amidst the usual farmstead outbuildings, built of logs or roughhewn lumber: a large barn, storage sheds, henhouse, animal pens, and the subject of this story, the Smokehouse; all long since gone except for the Smokehouse. It continued as the Ranger’s house for the first 15 or so years of Camp Orr until the late 1960’s, when it either burned, or was intentionally razed.

Earl and his mother actually moved into the house just across the first upriver ford, a stone and clapboard cabin, with large screened front porch, homesteaded according to Earl by Dave Greer in 1905, who later moved away. When Earl lived there 1943-1944, it was owned by Jack Stofer, an absentee owner who lived in Kansas City. That upriver house was known in the early days of Camp Orr as Scouter’s Cabin, though it was never used by the camp, and ultimately burned down. The stone pillars for its front porch, and a stone wall built out front by Earl’s father are all that remain today. Earl’s sister was born there in 1944.

The part of Camp Orr where the Arbaugh house was located, was homesteaded by Albert Green in 1900. Earl’s grandparents, Walter and Sarah Arbaugh had lived in that house for many years



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before Earl was born in 1938, and Earl's mother was raised there. But he does not know when it, or the smokehouse, were built. His grandparents didn't own the house and related farm.

The "Smokehouse" was indeed a smokehouse and is well-remembered by Earl. It sat directly behind the residence house, just a few steps out the back door from its screened-in back porch. It being a smokehouse, it had no windows; those were cut into it later by one of the early Camp Orr caretakers, who converted it to a storage building.

Besides chickens, the only source of meat and shortening for the family was hogs. Deer had long since been hunted to practical extinction in the Ozarks, and beef cattle weren't practical to raise. Hogs were "kept" but ran free throughout the year, to feed, breed and fatten off the land, especially so in the fall when the oaks produced copious acorns. Mid fall, when the hogs had fattened to their pre-winter maximum, the families would round up the free ranging hogs, enticing them with corn into pens, where the six very fattest hogs would be gated up. The rest of the herd was loosed back to the range, and for several weeks the penned, biggest hogs were fed all of the soaked corn they could eat, before they were slaughtered, butchered and then hung and smoked in the smokehouse. Equally important as the meat, was the lard rendered from the hogs. It was the only source of shortening for cooking and seasoning that the family had for the following year.

Earl noted that of all the buildings and property on the farmstead, only the smokehouse held something valuable enough to justify a lock on the door! And remembers well going with his grandmother into the smokehouse, when she would pinch off and share with him a tasty morsel of smoked pork.

He recalls that the Camp Orr Road was but a foot and horse trail from the River up to Mt. Sherman, and a very rough one at that. Several efforts to build it into a road, from both Kyle's Landing and Camp Orr were unsuccessful. If the amenities of a "town" were needed (post office, general store) it was much easier and quicker to walk the 3 miles down river to Erbie (despite the several river crossings) than climb up and over Mt. Sherman the 7 miles to reach Jasper. Earl recalls, "Going down the river to Erbie for us then, was like going to Walmart is for families now! " However, his grandfather had business from time to time in Jasper and would walk the 14 miles round trip up and over Mt. Sherman to get there.

Before the war, Grandfather Arbaugh engaged his several sons to help him work the bottomland farm of Camp Orr. Corn and hay were grown in the bottom, and there was a sorghum patch in what is now the assembly ground next to the staff area. However, by the time Earl and his mother moved in during the war, his grandfather was nearly blind, and found it beyond his means to farm and care for his family with all of the sons away at war, and in 1944, his grandparents loaded into a wagon, the milk cow tied behind, and made the journey up the Buffalo River Road to a friendlier homestead near Ponca, and Earl, his mother and baby sister moved back up to Mt. Sherman, never to return to the Camp Orr house.

However, Earl as a young man got a taste of what it took to survive in those times. In 1952, at age 14, he was hired to help his uncle, Jim Raney, bring in the harvest from the Camp Orr bottoms, working from first daylight to last dusk hauling corn and hay, for \$2.00 a day.



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Earl joined the Air Force after finishing his schooling and retired after a 20 year career serving our country literally all over the world, returning to Newton County becoming a career contractor. Among his many projects were restoring the footings of the present Ranger's house at Camp Orr, and building the current rappelling/climbing tower.

Give the Smokehouse a nod next time you drive into camp!



Above: Beginning and end of the workday.

Below: the results of the Ranger's daughter (an Eagle Scout) excavating the dirt floor: Lots of rusty iron implements, an old landline rotary dial telephone, and these scout figures.





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THE (CAMP ORR) LIFE AND TIMES OF JAMES ANDERSON

[Editor's note: As told by James Anderson, Camp Orr camper, 1958-61, Junior Staff 1962-66, Program Director, 1967. James scouted in Troop 74, Ozark, where he earned Eagle rank and attended the 1960 National Jamboree with the Westark contingent troop. He graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1970 with an Electrical Engineering degree, and had a long and distinguished career with Arkansas Power & Light, as well as a 31 year career with the U.S. Army reserves, retiring as a Colonel in the U.S. Army Engineer Corps. He now lives in Batesville. While most if not all of us have one or a few remarkable yarns about Camp Orr, James seems, Forest Gump-like, to have been in the middle of far more remarkable yarns than most]

Early in my Camp Orr Staff Career, I seemed to have a talent to being picked for the most unpopular, unpleasant and strange tasks. Often, my junior staff partner who was equally burdened, was Bill Dill of Harrison. Notions of safety and health, later legislated by state and federal governments and the Boy Scouts of America, such as OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Act) were totally non-existent, and all kinds of now-perceived dangerous tasks were done with a "get'er done" attitude with little thought for health and safety concerns. In hindsight, it's amazing that I survived Camp Orr, much less to the three-quarter century mark!

Cleaning the water tank

Probably my first year on staff, Pat Bolin nominated Bill and me to clean the concrete water tank on the hill above the troop campsites, where it gravity-fed water for the summer to the camp. Once drained, that cleaning involved a two-person team clambering down into the dank, dark, stuffy, unventilated tank, armed with brand new brooms and jugs of Clorox. The total surface of floor, walls and ceiling had to be doused with Clorox, and then scrubbed with the long handled brooms, before the tank was rinsed, drained and again, and filled with water for the scouts for the rest of the summer. The fumes were overpowering to breath and offensive to the eyes, and by the time we climbed out, we were literally bathed in pure Clorox bleach.

We couldn't wait to wash off and be liberated from the feel and smell of the bleach, and swore that was the last time we allowed ourselves to be volunteered for that duty. However, as the summer wore on, and the ticks and mosquitos came into the fullness of their summer, we happily discovered that as the other staffers shooed, swatted, plucked and scratched the onslaught of vampire critters, we were delightfully ignored and totally exempt from their blood sucking attentions; a wonderful luxury in the summer Ozarks.

I volunteered for tank cleaning duty each summer after that: one day of misery for a full summer of insect exemption was a darn good deal!



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Filling the Water Tank

The water tank, after cleaning, had to be filled each summer before camp started. It was filled by a pump, which either drew directly from the Buffalo River, or a very shallow well near the bank of the River, in the upper aquatics area, just above the trail crossing that heads upriver. It would take several days to fill the tank, and was the camp caretaker's job to make sure the pump was operational when the staff arrived. However, when I arrived for my first or second summer as a junior staffer, as the pump was engaged to start filling the tank, it was discovered that one of the seals was faulty, and periodically (sometimes every hour, sometimes every 3 or 4 hours), the pump would start failing, and it had to be turned off, resealed with a jury-rigged strip of rubber, and turned back on again. Because of the unpredictability of its failure, and the need for continuous pumping, it required that someone attend the pump, 24/7. That lucky guy, appointed by Camp Director Pat Bolin, was me for at least 3 if not 4 days, and the nights between. I sat, stood, lay, slept, and walked around next to the pump, never stepping away from my duty for the next several days and nights waiting for the next failure. They were kind enough to bring me my sleeping bag and meals from the Dining Hall for those three or four days, and by golly, the tank was full by the time camp started. [Ed. Note: when the River became National Park in 1982, drawing from the River, or a well fed by it, was prohibited, and a deep well was drilled up near the water tank.

Bluff Rescue

During one of the summers that my staff duty was camping and cooking, I regularly led troops to Signal Pine for an overnight. It was proximate to an abundant blueberry patch, and when they were ripe, I would volunteer to cook blueberry pancakes, if my charges would pick the blueberries; they were usually eager to make that deal with me. But that left me well-familiar with the trail and variations thereof which led to and from the Pine.

A Fort Smith troop was returning from a trek to the Pine one day, and suffered a straggler, who would fall behind, they would wait, he would catch up, they would proceed, he would fall behind, they would wait, he would catch up, etc. etc. Until finally, late in the trip, they stopped for his catch up, and he did not appear. They hollered for him without success and the scoutmaster dispatched some of the older boys back to Camp to summon help. Because of my familiarity with the area, I was one of the staffers sent on the search and ended up, reckoning from what I knew, where the straggler had gone astray, and found him. However, the boy was on top of a short bluff, 10 or 20 feet high, and I was at the bottom of the bluff, with no apparently safe way for either of us to make up the distance. This was of course decades before Scouts took up rope assisted climbing, but I had brought rope with me and used my pioneering training to throw one end up to the boy, who secured it to a substantial tree or rock. I was able to clamber up to him, secured the roped through his belt loops and around myself, and got us to the bottom of



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the bluff, and safely back to camp.

The camp director had witnessed this through binoculars from the assembly ground in front of the Dining Hall, and when I returned, commented that I seemed to get up that Bluff just like a fly on a wall. To my knowledge, that was the origin of my camp nickname, “Fly” [Editor’s note: this is one of several, and the most distinguished of several origin stories of James’ nickname, so we will accept it at face value here.]

Overstoked Campfire

The closing campfire each week was a humungous pile of wood, to be sufficient to light the festivities, and fully impress the assembled scouts at the end of the week. Pat Bolin, a great story creator and teller (and source of the original Smokey Joe legend), showed up in the early years of camp with a river rock that looked surprisingly like a dainty foot in a slipper, and created a wonderful story about an Indian princess, her lover, her grief stricken death, and the fact that this enchanted petrified foot had come to rest in this beautiful valley where this Romeo and Juliet legend had occurred, related of course to a ghost who still wandered the beautiful Buffalo River Valley looking for her lover, or her foot, or something.

That led to a closing campfire opening, which summoned the Indian ghost to light this fire, bringing light to the dark. The setup was rigged well ahead of time by a wire strung from a nearby high tree which served to transport a roll of toilet paper, soaked in kerosene, lit and sent down the wire by a staffer in the tree, which would zing its way down the wire as a magic burning arrow into the massive fire lay, also soaked in kerosene, and voila’, light from dark from the invisible hand of the Indian ghost!

On one particular night, when Art Williams (more on Art below), and I were to MC the campfire, we entrusted the setup to someone else on the staff who mistakenly soaked the toilet paper and the firewood with gasoline, not kerosene. Art and I were standing next to the prepped fire, to be properly illuminated by the Ghost, when a ball of fire exploded from the tree, hit the stacked fire lay, which violently exploded, throwing Art and me to the ground and 20 and 30 pound logs high into the air.

Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt, by the grace of God and the good luck of the Boy Scouts!

Politically incorrect in Harrison

In my last couple of years on senior staff, I was close to Art Williams, who was somewhat older than many of us. By the time Art showed up on the staff in 1967, he had done two tours of duty in Vietnam, earning a bronze star and silver star as a tank commander, and was back in the University of Arkansas seeking a degree, and need a summer job, which he found on the staff at Camp Orr. Art didn’t have a car to get away on the weekends, I did, and that sealed the friendship. Having survived Vietnam, Art was a free spirit, inclined to seek more spirited adventures than I as an electrical engineer raised in Ozark.

We found ourselves one weekend in Jasper, where we encountered two friendly young women, there with VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), a domestic version of the Peace Corps which had sent these motivated young ladies to one of the poorest counties in the U.S. to do



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some good. Finding entertainment in Jasper limited, we joined them in their jeep to head for Harrison, where there was a very animated rally occurring on the town square for Justice Jim Johnson. Johnson had served as an Arkansas judge and legislator, but continued to run for higher office: Governor, and U.S. Senate. He ran several times, unsuccessfully, for those offices. He was a firebrand segregationist who was campaigning to set aside the burgeoning judicial and legislative decisions of the 1950's and 1960's which advanced the rights of black people to be equal to whites.

It was a pretty high energy, high emotion rally in Harrison, the crowd obviously aligned with Justice Jim's segregationist views of putting black people back in their place. Someone among our VISTA dates and Art, decided this would be a good time to start singing "We Shall Overcome" – or some such well recognized song for equal rights. So we cut loose at the top of our campfire song voices.

The attention of the crowd immediately turned to us, and as one, without a word, we knew that unless we wanted to be run out of Harrison tarred and feathered on a rail, we had to skedaddle, and we did, very quickly, back to Newton County.

The End of the Camp Orr Jeeps

During my years at Camp Orr, the Army surplus jeeps were part of the character of the Camp. The Camp director was always scooting around in one, they were sent up the hill many times to rescue cars or campers stuck on the treacherous roads and the staff all wanted to be able to drive one. They weren't in great condition to start with, and probably from some combination of overuse, abuse, and deferred maintenance, there were only two left by my last year in 1967. One didn't even start, and the brakes didn't work on either of them.

Those in authority decided to take them into Jasper at the end of the camp season, to see whether they could be made serviceable. The camp could save a good deal of money if a wrecker didn't have to make two trips down and back up the hill to pick them up. If we could just get them to the top of Mt. Sherman on our own, the camp would save a bunch of money on professional towing. Bill Dill (again) and I were "volunteered" for the task.

The jeeps were hooked together by a steel bar of some length, bolted to the rear bumper of the operable jeep, and the front bumper of the inoperable jeep.

We had the impression that this was kind of a Hail Mary redneck engineering effort by camp management, which might not succeed, but worth a try. It was uncertain whether the lead jeep, even if in compound low 4 wheel drive, would have the power and traction to tow the second jeep up the steepest, roughest part of the road, and in worst case, a wrecker could be called in.

We lowered the windshields, why I don't remember. But we did indeed have a plan if the lead jeep lost traction and the tandem began sliding back down the hill without brakes. There was a spare tire in the back of Bill's (the rear) jeep, which if we stopped moving up hill, Bill would toss under the rear tires of the jeep to stop it rolling back. We didn't test that theory, or practice it, or unfortunately think about it much...we had a plan, hold my beer and watch this!

So off we headed up the treacherous hill, me giving my lead jeep all the power and speed I



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possibly could. But alas, the time came, with the depths of Raney Cove plunging off to our left, that I could no longer maintain traction and forward progress.

Surprisingly, Bill executed well – once he realized our forward motion had stopped, with me still spinning and burning rubber in 4 wheel drive in front, he managed to get the tire out of his jeep and under the wheels, but either the jeep rolled backward right over the thrown tire, or the jeep's wheels went on either side of it, and even though my foot was still on the gas with 4 wheels spinning forward, the tandem jeeps were sliding unstoppably with increasing speed backwards towards the drop off. At that point, I executed an emergency exit, making it in one leap from the driver's seat, over the steering wheel and the fortuitously lowered front windshield, onto the road in front of my lead jeep, as the jeeps went over the edge in deafening rumble, crumble and crash far into into the depths of Raney Cove.

Bill and I trudged the long mile down the hill to advise management of the outcome. As I recall, there was absolutely no scolding or criticizing – they were just glad we were alive, and seemed to expect this as a possible, if not the probable outcome.

I heard later from the Scout Executive that the jeeps had been winched from Raney Cove by a wrecker, but never returned to service at Camp Orr.

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