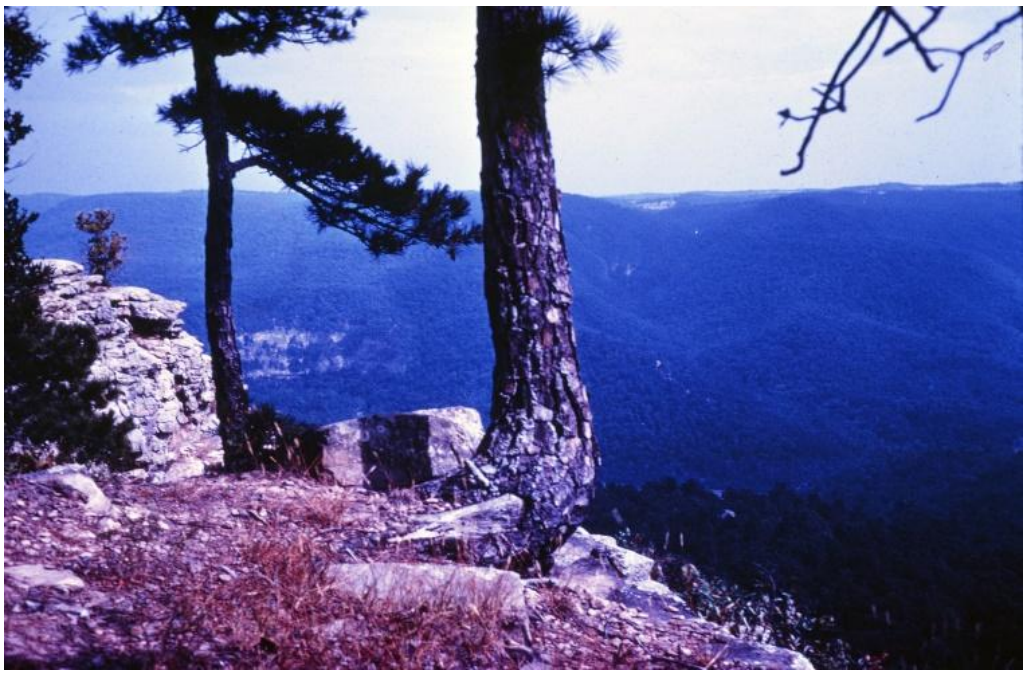
BLUFF LINES

Thirteenth edition, November 2026

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.



this edition:

1) An Ozark Mountain Love Story
2) Fourth Annual Alumni Reunion a Success
3) The Wilderness Library
4) The Camp Orr Fur Trading Company

AN OZARK MOUNTAIN LOVE STORY

Ed. Note: in my 1960's Camp Orr experiences, and up until the late 1980's this could not have happened; the only females within miles of Camp Orr were the professional cooking staff. Different times, different meaningful memories, this one leading to perhaps a third-generation Camp Orr camper!]

By MariBeth Harris Graham, Staff 2010 (trading post), 2011 (aquatics), 2012 (climbing), 2013 (Executive Assistant to Director), 2014 (climbing director), 2015 (medic) 2016-2017 (volunteer staff assistant), 2020 (volunteer staff), 2023 (climbing instructor).

In June of 2010, my dad took off work on a Wednesday to drive me over to Camp Orr to staff for the very first time. I was hired to work in the Trading Post that summer, with zero experience with Boy Scouts and having never set foot in Newton County. I had 10 years of experience in the Girl Scouts, but my interactions with BSA were limited to those at Scouting Universities at the University of Arkansas. Completing my application, "Trading Post" seemed like a safe place to apply, with my minimal understanding of the inner workings of BSA. My junior year of high school was extended by snow-days make-up, making me arrive late during the middle of first camper week. Camp was in full swing with what felt like 700 people enthusiastically in the groove of summer camp. At arrival, I knew only one other person in the entire camp, Kris Baker (Camp name Special K), who lived in my neighborhood and had invited me to apply after noticing me carrying Girl Scout cookies on the school bus. I quickly paired up with my fellow female Trading Post staffer, Kristen Brannan, also a first timer with no prior BSA experience. I was very overwhelmed those first few days, and she helped me get comfortable in this new space. On my first night, I was standing with Kristen outside of the laundry room across the road from the younger girl's staff cabin (also known as the cook's cabin). As Kristen was visiting with other staffers, Special K emerged from the woods, accompanied by Beanz (Garrett Kuna) and Evan Graham. Being the only person I knew before camp, Special K was also trying to ease me into the fold of the camp staff one introduction at a time. He enthusiastically introduced me to the other boys, much as he had at flag earlier that day. This introduction to Evan Graham, however, ended up being one of the most significant of my entire life.

That first summer, Evan worked in Buffalo Trail across the road from the Trading Post. I was 17, Evan was 15, celebrating his 16th birthday at camp on June 10th, just after we met. He quickly developed a crush on me and would often come into the Trading Post just to "hang out". I was a 17-year-old girl on a staff of about 70 adolescent boys and men with no cell phone service or internet access, trying to navigate the brand-new experience of an onslaught of male attention. By the end of that summer, Evan had expressed to me that he liked me, and I replied that I kind of liked him. However, after camp ended, his area director reached out, and I ended up dating his boss for about 5 months. In the summer of 2011, Evan again expressed his interest in me. I again, denied him. Our third summer on staff in 2012, on the final night of camp, we finally decided to pursue a relationship.

Fast forward to the summer of 2017 when we had been together for five years, I graduated from college and worked full time as a nightshift ICU nurse. I would work 3-6 days in a row, followed immediately by 3-6 days of volunteering at Orr, for the entire month of June. There was a window of time where both Evan and I were at camp for four days in a row, volunteering together. I had expressed to him that my dream proposal would be at Camp Orr, surrounded by our friends. I had a sneaking suspicion, without definitive proof, that he might propose during that window.

After dinner on June 26, 2017, I was standing in the Camp Director's office, occupied at that time by Scout Executive, Dan Dillard. Standing next to me, was one of my closest friends at the time, Luke Dunn (camp name, Piggy). I had no suspicion that anything was in the works; we were all simply hanging out. Over the camp radio, there was a call from the Program Director and another close friend, Jake Kremers. "MariBeth…… we need you…. To come to the Dining Hall……" "uh MariBeth…. Your mom needs help by the laundry room……." (My mom was the head cook from 2011-2017). This was not a firm call from someone who actually needed assistance but had the tone of someone who was definitely up to something. As soon as he said "laundry room," I SLAMMED my hands on Dan's desk and said, "IT'S HAPPENING." Luke and Dan just smiled at me. My heart began racing and Luke started trying to bring humor to the situation and calm me down by coming up with ridiculous and insane scenarios that could explain why I was summoned. "Maybe a camper got into a fist fight with your mom on the way to go do laundry. We should probably go check that out". Or "Maybe Evan got stuck in the dryer!". Luke kept that up, coming up with a myriad of absurd stories to make me laugh and keep me calm as we walked the length of the road from the admin building to behind the dining hall.



As we passed the dining hall and approached the laundry room, I could see Evan, standing by himself in a nice blue button-down in the spot where he and I were first introduced. My heart was pounding out of my chest as I walked up, and as I cleared the side of the Laundry Room half of the camp staff came into sight including many of my closest friends, my mother, and a surprise guest, my sister, standing behind the laundry room. My friend, Jonathan Malagon, was running around us snapping photographs while the crowd whispered and vibrated with excitement. Evan said something like "you

know what I'm gonna ask you right?" and I said something like "UH HUH YEAH".



I was so nervous about having all this attention on me that I had no control over; my arms were fully extended, my hands clenched into fists. (Something I did not realize I was doing until I saw the pictures).

I don't even think he said the words "will you marry me" because we were both so nervous, but I definitely said "yes". The crowd erupted into cheers while Evan and I hugged nervously. Shortly after, mom directed everyone to the administration building, where they had a little engagement party planned for us. One of my favorite details from the pictures Malagon took of us shows in the left of the frame, Scout Executive Dan slowly creeps from around the Mess Hall and into the crowd. It turns out that when Luke and I walked out the front of the admin building, he went out the back and speed-walked across camp to watch the proposal too.



We got married the next September in the meadow at Camp NOARK, the Girl Scout Camp I grew up at in Huntsville. Every groomsman was an Eagle Scout and an Orr Alumni. We've now been together for 14 years and have two sons; the oldest just joined Cub Scouts. My father was a boy scout in Berryville and attended Camp Orr, so when my son attends his first Cub outing at Camp Orr, he will be the third generation!

FOUR ANNUAL ALUMNI REUNIONS IN A ROW, SECOND BEST ATTENDANCE: A couple of dozen alumni, representing a span of 50+ years from Camp Orr's first year in 1955 to the late twenty-teens gathered on a gorgeous fall weekend this October 24-25 to bask again in the glory that is Camp Orr. For 30 bucks, you got a place to sleep, two dinners, a lunch and two breakfasts, a chance shine up the old Camp, some interesting programs and time to just chill.



Programs included, at right, presentations from National Park Service chief firefighter Fenn Wimberly (himself an Orr alum) on the status of the Buffalo National River; Shiloh Museum on Newton County historical photos, families and villages; and our 2026 newly-minted Camp Director Mark Gormley on how this year's Camp Orr summer camp went. For those of us old-timers who think Camp Orr is just a summer camp, the weekend preceding us filled the camp with over 400 scouts, scouters and instructors for "Weekend on Ropes".



Camp was as spiffed and tidy as I've seen it in years, but we pitched in to spit polish it a bit more with Saturday morning service projects: building two new picnic tables,



replacing campsite name signs for all 22 campsites, and replacing the signposts where needed;





and replacing the screen fittings on all the dining room windows so the screens will do their job in keeping critters out when the windows are cranked open for circulation.



The Shiloh presenter was surprised to realize that Camp Orr may be one of Newton County's oldest continuous and largest "settlements" with some very interesting culture (Smokey Joe, etc.) and expressed an interest in coming next year, arriving early and staying late, to record some oral histories of the camp from us alumni.



The leisurely afternoon off gave time to fish and relax down at the river.



After dinner, the evening being warm, we eased into a "campfire-less" campfire in the Uncle Frank Lewis Lodge/dining hall, with everyone pitching in with memories, tales and yarns of their Camp Orr days.

We all pitched in to cook, serve and clean. Below two tax attorneys and a retired professor show their dishwashing skills.







Special thanks to Camp Ranger (and Orr Alum) Billy Williams who was offsite this year but thoroughly staged our work projects beforehand with materials, tools, fittings and instructions; Karen Harris, her alum status coming from many years on the cooking staff, who once again kept us timely and well fed; and David and Christie Cantrall who through a lasagna dinner fundraiser bought and brought 4 nice benches for foot weary scouts to take a load of their feet and added $300 to the Camp Orr improvement fund.



Four of these nice benches were assembled and stationed throughout the camp, at left:



At right, the Buffalo Trail pavilion that our alumni contributions funded last summer:

Mark your calendar for next year, October 22-24, 2027!

THE WILDERNESS LIBRARY

By Jack Butt, camper 1961-1964, junior staff 1965-1966

In the early 1960's, troops arriving at Camp Orr were regaled by staff welcomes with all the interesting hiking destinations for their time off from advancement and merit badge classes. This was 10 years before Congress authorized the Buffalo National River and 20 years before the land was fully acquired for the development of trails, campgrounds and river accesses. The only available trail was simply the jeep road up and down the valley along the river that had been established by the early pioneer settlors beginning in the 1830s' – a rough wagon road, that in the early days of Camp Orr was still navigable by 4-wheel drive and used to access mostly abandoned river-side farms along the river. By following that road and its many crossings of the river, scout troops could hike downriver 3 miles to the village of Erbie and its small country store; a mile upriver to what is now Kyle's landing brought scouts to a nice gravel bar for camping across the river from Mud Cave: A crawl for maybe 20 yards back into the bluff before the "cave" petered out; and 3 more miles upriver to find Hemmed in Hollow, at the end of narrow scramble up a steep hollow, allegedly the tallest waterfall between the Appalachians and the Rockies. And there was always Antenna or Signal Pine, reached by a web of inter-lacing and ill-defined trails which troops followed and blazed, trying to follow whoever the first scout was whose curiosity made their way to it by dead reckoning.

And then there was the mysterious Wilderness Library. Not much was known or shared at Scout Camp about the Wilderness Library, except that a well-meaning hermit named Ted Richmond moved into the Buffalo River Valley, on the hill above Camp Orr, many years before Camp Orr was acquired by the Scouts. He gathered a collection of books and would walk through the rough Ozark hills and valleys of the Buffalo River Valley with a backpack of books, stopping at each homestead he came to, to offer them reading material. He gained some national notoriety for his "Johnny Appleseed" goodwill in spreading literature and knowledge among the mountain folk, and Eleanor Roosevelt was among several who supplied him reading material for his constituents. And he had left (mysteriously) before Camp Orr came into being, leaving his Wilderness Library intact.

That was about all the information we had, and the description had enough mystique about it that a number of scouts and troops were lured into the trek to the Wilderness Library. The library was reached by hiking about a mile up the Camp Orr Road (the steepness and dreariness of climbing a steep dirt road was not generally popular among the scouts) and then turning right/west on a faint jeep trail and proceeding maybe 1/3 of a mile across a bench to the Wildness Library. When I first saw it in the early sixties, it was a solidly built log cabin, with windows and doors either broken or missing, about 12 X 15, with a roof and floor that were beginning to rot and fail. We dodged wasps and mud-dobbers who had taken up residence there and picked around the copious vermin droppings on the floor, looking for interesting souvenirs of any kind. The "artifacts" were limited to a foot-thick pile of mildewed and disarrayed periodicals and books

littering the floor, most of which were, and my only memory being of, a vast number of Congressional Records, printed newspaper style, which would have to qualify as the most abstract and boring reading in the world, unless one was a political scientist. And then we walked back down the hill, disappointed that the "mystery" of Wilderness Library wasn't quite like exploring the tombs in the Egyptian pyramids and provided no clue to Ted's mysterious disappearance. Nobody seemed to know what had happened to Ted.

During my later years at Camp Orr, I found out from members of Raney family, descendants of the first valley settlors, some of whom still lived on Mt. Sherman and worked at Camp Orr, who had actually known Ted, that he wasn't a bad guy. Friendly, smart, well-meaning, but perceived by the hard-working, pioneer-farming hill folk, as somewhat strange for living his life that way. His downfall and departure apparently came, about the same time Camp Orr was started, due to the overly colorful description of an "up north" or "back east", "big city" journalist, in a national periodical which described Ted's efforts as bringing a modicum of literacy and basic knowledge to the poor, ignorant, barefooted, foolish and benighted hillbillies of the Arkansas Ozarks. When those national writings made their way to being read by Newton County folk (who though mountain folk indeed were generally quite literate and hardly ignorant or benighted), they were greatly offended, and some, several, many? blamed this community shaming on Ted, some already being suspicious of someone who didn't have anything better to do with his time than drag a pack of used books through the hills. Ted became the victim of those hurt feelings and no longer feeling welcome, left to never return. That was my knowledge of it after my years at Camp Orr.

Decades later, I came across further information about Ted which painted a fuller picture. Born James Theodore Richmond in 1890 in Nebraska to a physician and his wife, he was drafted in 1917 for World War I and served in the infantry in Europe. He attended at least 3 colleges and worked as a journalist for several newspapers. In 1925 he moved to the Kingston, Madison County area where he worked as an associate editor of *Ozark Life: The Mirror of the Ozarks,* until it sold in 1931 and then homesteaded 150 acres on the hill above Camp Orr where he built his "Wildcat Cabin", so named because a bobcat followed him in his search for the cabin site; and began his wilderness library venture. He solicited reading material nationwide, which came flooding in, which he carried by backpack from the Mt. Sherman Post Office down the mountain to his cabin and thence throughout the Ozark Hills of the Buffalo River country.

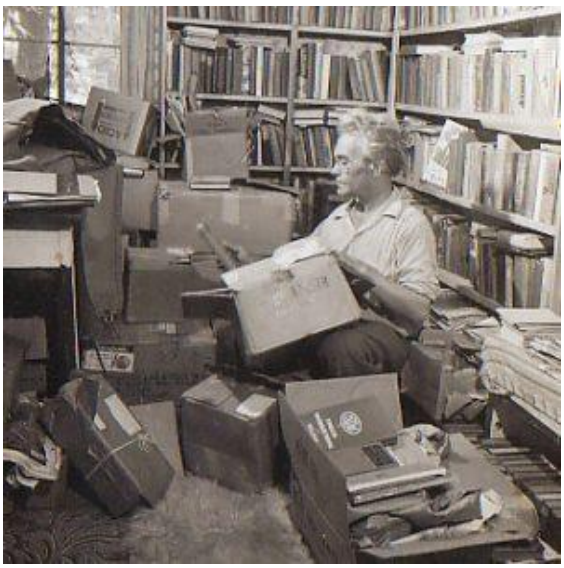
Seeking more funds, Ted incorporated the Wilderness Library in 1950. and had an all-star cast on his board of directors, including Arkansas Governor Sid McMath and Congressman Jim Trimble. The United States Information Agency did a short documentary film of Ted, coupled with a short feature about lighthouses and jeep races, which was shown and well-received in Europe. It is narrated in French but actually shows Ted doing his wilderness library thing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gZMyoZEUe7I . However his fame became disastrous. The national attention led to an article, written by Hartzell Spence, published in the Saturday Evening Post in 1952 demeaning of the hillbilly library and its patrons, and indeed led to community

furor by many against Ted. It was article's author, not Ted, who had made the characterizations and despite Ted's protestations that he was innocent of demeaning his neighbors, the damage was done. Ted, being somewhat run out of the country, moved to Texarkana in 1953 and married, but his wife declined to move with him back to Newton County, and after returning for 3 summers to do his Wilderness Library work, he left the Wilderness Library in 1956, the year after Camp Orr opened, never to return. In 1975 he died, and is buried, in Texarkana, Texas. He left no children.

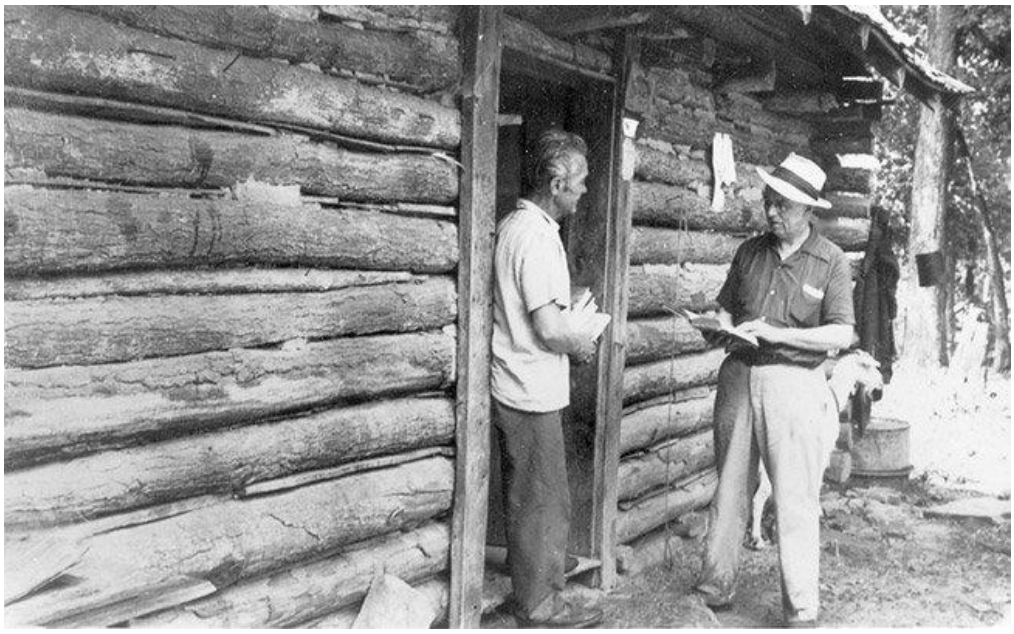
A branch of the Wilderness Library was built on mountaintop land on Mt. Sherman, belonging to Jeff Raney, a big supporter of Ted and his efforts, and as far as I know still stands on Raney land.

Two or three decades ago, but two or three decades after I worked at Camp Orr, I sought to re-visit the Wilderness Library. I found the site, but the hands of time and works of nature had fully dissolved any trace of it, dust to dust. Nothing remains of the early scout treks to the Wilderness Library, except the memories.

Much of the information in this article is drawn from CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas. https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/ted-richmond-4438/, and the online, unfinished book of Ted's life is at https://wildernesslibrary.com/post/ Thanks also to Dennis Raney for providing information and photos for this article.



Ted Richmond at the Wilderness Library; This is the original Wildcat Cabin built on the hill about a mile above Camp Orr, the picture being sometime between 1935 and 1953.





Wilderness library at about the time Camp Orr opened and Ted Richmond abandoned it, 1955-1956





This is the Mt. Sherman Branch of the Wilderness Library on Jeff Raney land, circa 1950 (outside and inside), and below,



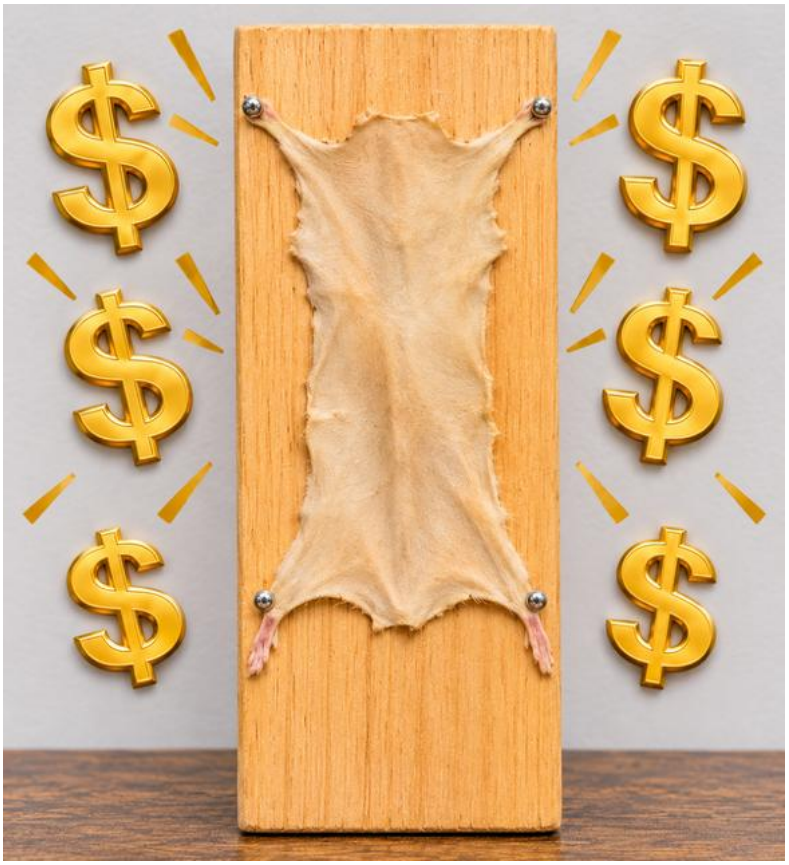


The Camp Orr Fur Trading Company

Tony Hilliard, Troop 20, West Helena; Troop then Explorer Post 104, Fayetteville; Cabot Explorer Post to Eagle; Camp Orr Junior Staff 1970-1973: Hiking, Nature, Swimming, Canoeing

In the summer of 1972, I worked on Junior Staff as Swimming and Canoeing instructor at the rate of $20.00 per week, plus room (i.e. tent) and board. That summer, Camp Orr had a mouse problem worse than normal. The Junior Staff set out traps and caught a few mice. The discussion one day turned to tanning techniques. I had successfully tanned a rattlesnake skin my first summer at Camp (killing poisonous snakes on sight being one of the many "times have changed" aspects of outdoor ethics over the years), so several of us decided to try our hands at tanning one or two of the mouse hides.

After skinning the trapped mouse, we stretched and tacked the hide on a small 2x4 block and let it dry with salt. It turned out pretty well, for a mouse hide. Within a couple of days, we were in the trading post showing it off when one of the campers offered $5 for the hide. Another camper jumped in and offered $10. By the time the bidding war was over, we sold that tanned mouse hide for ***Twenty Dollars*** which equaled a week's pay for teaching swimming and canoeing eight hours day!



We saw a clear marketing opportunity. Immediately, we began trapping mice more ambitiously, and mass-producing tanned mouse hides tacked on little 2x4 wooden blocks. Several staff buddies and I divided the labor between trapping, skinning, processing and marketing the finished product to mass produce the new, high-demand product. We even discussed forming a corporation and issuing stock in this venture, but a lawyer/Scoutmaster wisely advised against it.

Granted, the second and later mouse hides didn't sell for as much as the original hide, but by the end of the summer, I made significantly more money selling the mouse hides than working on the waterfront; and by the same token we had also significantly reduced the mouse problem at Camp Orr!

It all seemed like a win-win effort until later that fall.

Though we had found a profitable way to handle a pest problem, that fall a friend and I had a successful squirrel hunt. As soon as I skinned that first squirrel, I looked at that skinned squirrel, thought about those skinned mice, and have been unable to eat squirrel ever since.

Beyond the fur trading company memories, my next deepest memory of Camp Orr is that as the youngest staffer in the hiking area, I can't tell you how many times I was assigned to lead a troop up to Antenna Pine or hike to Hemmed-In Hollow! However, the first time was tough. As a scout I attended summer camp at the Eastern Arkansas Area Council, Camp Cedar Valley, Pine Trail Reservation, so my staff year was my first year at Camp Orr. To learn the path, I helped clean the trail to Antenna Pine during staff week and was expected to get a troop to the top by myself the next week. Indeed, I had that assignment and nearing the bluff with the troop following, I couldn't find the left turn of the main trail that I was looking for, so rather than get the troop lost I returned to camp, earning the moniker "Which Way Hilliard" for the rest of the summer.

Ironically, when I took my room in the Doctor's Cabin for the Camp Orr Alumni Reunion this past October, 54 years after I tanned that first mouse hide, I was greeted by significant mouse droppings on my bed. No doubt that was Karma from the current generation of mice getting revenge for my actions against their distant ancestors. Be Prepared!

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!

Westark Camp Orr Alumni Committee:

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 emeritus*