

Camp Day by Gary D. Moore
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The unimproved end of Roach Road was passable only a few months of the year. Scout leaders toled forty boys down the seldom-traveled lane. The station wagons and sedans deftly navigated muddy, water-filled ruts and potholes on the two-track. Their destination was a rustic camp.

P.L. Graham donated the wooded wilderness property for use as a Scout campground. The beautiful rural parcel was surrounded on three sides by the meandering Black River. A metal structure stood high, but did not tower above white and scotch pines, mighty oaks, and sugar maples. George Flott and others enclosed the old windmill at the bottom and installed a pitcher pump. The pump needed to be primed each time it was used, but water from the shallow well was cold and tasted better than water from the tap at home.

A large primitive lodge was adjacent to the tower. Inside the uninsulated structure was a large potbelly stove centrally located amid surplus bunk beds with worn springs and musty mattresses. An old fashion cook stove took up most of the concrete floored kitchen. There was plentiful wood to fuel the stoves. Regardless of the amount of heat radiated from the wood burners, heavy sleeping bags and blankets were necessary for the cold, damp Michigan nights. However, there were few complaints...until it came to stoking the fire, but it was a much worse ordeal to allow the fire to go out.

There was no electricity at the camp in the 1950s. Flashlights were a necessity. Outdoor privies were located several yards distance from the lodge and well. The location gave credence to the term, primitive camping. It was, indeed, primitive, but awesomely beautiful.

After the youthful scouts dissipated excess energy with organized activities, scoutmasters, Ken French, Chuck Fuller, Burt Strutridge, and Ken Grandy assembled everyone around the flagpole in front of the lodge.

"We need wood for a fire. Older scouts chopped down thorn apple trees on the flood plain last Fall. Gather only dead trees and branches. Please be careful...the thorns are sharp... and watch out for poison ivy!" Chuck Fuller instructed.

The excited and eager scouts paid heed to most of the instructions. Then, they raced to the area near the river where the thorn apple trees were felled. Within a short time, branches and trees were hacked, chopped, and then dragged to the fire pit near the flagpole. But, this activity did not happen without incident. Several scouts were picked, poked, barbed, and stuck by the sharp, dry thorns. It was unavoidable. Fortunately, no one received an injury requiring more than a needle and a sharp knife to remove a thorny splinter.

Jim Grandy regretfully showed his father the blunt end of a thorny spike sticking from just below his kneecap. Jim promised that he would be more careful while the splinter was painfully extracted. Another scout lodged a thorn under his thumbnail. That painful sliver would need to fester, and then work itself out over several days. The suggestion of washing dishes to aide the process was not well received by the young scout although the scout's mother would have appreciated that assistance.

Scoutmasters carefully chopped the thorny branches to length for burning, but the prickly branches also barbed them without mercy. Eventually there was enough wood gathered. Less rambunctious scouts sat on stumps and logs around the blazing fire. Ken Grandy brought several bags of marshmallows, but the majority of the soft puffy balls were hurled. Few marshmallows were toasted and eaten.

The forty young boys and the adults, had a memorable time. Eventually, the fire died, and forty, much less energetic, scouts piled into various vehicles for the trip home. The majority of those scouts would enjoy that camp at various outings until they graduated from High School in the late 60s.