

Pemigewassett Newsletter

Summer 2011 Number Two

Well, our cozy little community of 250 has now been dwelling on the shores of Baker Pond for well over a week now, and the program is at full throttle. The weather has been extremely helpful – mostly sunny days in the mid-seventies and low eighties – and the lake has warmed enough that many of us are electing to continue our Polar Bears after the obligatory first week. We've enjoyed two days of athletics with our neighboring camps. Over fifteen trips have already been logged, with six more slated for today (Thursday), including a group of Seniors headed for the newly-renovated Madison Hut perched in a stony col at the north end of the Presidential Range. *The Mikado* has been cast, and rehearsals are underway. A second week of



occupations follow hard on the heels of the first, with Deb Pannell's hugely-popular art offerings setting a torrid pace for interest and productivity. The Beginners' Caving Trip departed this morning for New York State for a tour of three separate caverns, an activity very rare in the camping world and

certain to provide its participants with memories to last a lifetime. 2011 is well out of the gate and picking up speed in the first turn.

For the second Sunday meeting of the season, Danny Kerr manned the lectern for a talk entitled "Nothing Is Impossible," based on his training for and successful finish of the New York City Marathon in 2005. Complete with charts of a sixteen-week training regimen and photos of the route and various participants over the years, Danny's presentation gripped the room with its simple and direct messages. The journey is as important as the destination; if you want to get somewhere or achieve something in life, take the first step, commit yourself to the next one, and patience and persistence will ultimately deliver the goods. Danny then invited Senior Max Livingstone-Peters to the front of the room, and Max added to Danny's examples with an account of his own battle with and triumph over nagging homesickness during his first season at Pemi. The third speaker was Trip Leader Sylvia Parol, whose participation in the Pemi West Mountain Leadership program in Washington State truly stretched her limits but quickly brought her to the same realization as Danny's and Max's. A number of striking photographs of Olympic National Park put the exclamation mark on a compelling evening that left no-one

in the room missing an extremely useful developmental point: confidence and determination for young and old!

The Fourth of July celebration got off to a leisurely start with an 8AM reveille and 8:30 breakfast. After a hearty rendition of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" (joined melodically by our British staff singing "God Save the Queen"), counselors and boys headed back to the cabins to plan their floats for the annual Pee-rade. We honestly can't remember the results being any more creative and entertaining as your sons and their mentors mounted a dramatic procession that was half Kate and William's wedding half Benny Hill.

As always, the Junior Camp led the way, three of their number (British counselors Ben Ridley, Alastair Bowman, and Matt Turner) marching in under the Union Jack in a convincing likeness of a Redcoat fife and drum corps. No sooner had they broken into "God Save the Queen" than the sound system thundered out the opening notes of "Born in the USA" – and the rest of Pemi's "infant prodigy kids" burst in from every direction in their all-American gear, each of them gyrating in immaculately choreographed moves. It was like some opening ensemble spectacular on "Dancing with the Founding Fathers."

The Lower Lower featured L1 with a witty rendition of "The Night before Pemi," with Andre Altherr starring as a first-time camper all snug in his bed while visions of Polar Bears danced in his head. L2 whisked us back to colonial and pre-colonial times to witness Columbus's non-discovery of India and the first Thanksgiving, all accompanied by Robert Loeser singing "America." L3 followed with the first of several "Jeopardy" take-offs of the day, also being the first to weave Danny's "Nothing's Impossible" speech into their drill. (It's always nice to know the boys hear us, even if it's not always clear they take us as reverently as they might.) L4 in turn evoked the longstanding (if utterly unfounded! We swear! Honest! Hope to die!) legend of Bakey, the Freshwater Shark, said to lurk in Lower Baker Pond. Played by Ben Williams with chilling verisimilitude, Bakey ultimately convinced all who doubted his existence that there is more in heaven and Lower Baker than is dreamt of in a naturalist's philosophy. (First *Hamlet* allusion of the year, in case you're counting.) The musical accompaniment? The Monkees' "I'm a Believer," naturally.

The Hill Tent led the way for the Upper Lower with an unusually cerebral "Short Story about American Foreign Policy," featuring Tristan Smith as John Adams crossing the Atlantic (aptly represented by a non-PBA Nalgene) to seek foreign favors. The skit took full advantage of Andrew Virden's flawless French and Pepe Periel's native Spanish to lend linguistic credibility to the story. Per Soderberg, as a gentleman from the Netherlands, offered up some Dutch to round out the language table. L5 uncovered the long-

concealed truth about what really goes on at Pemi after Taps as, despite Nick Ridley's Big Brotherish presence, the boys in his cabin conducted a lively late-night trade in black market goods, including chocolate milk swapped for two minutes of "Angry Bird." L6 delved into Pemi's past with a rendition of the first post-hike "dope stop" in 1919 ("dope" being then as it is now "New Hampshirese" for carbonated soft drinks) – only to follow with a decidedly Gangsta permutation reputed to reflect current practice and an avid craving for Monster. Wrapping up the Loweres was another "Jeopardy" clone, featuring Joe Robey as MC and asking stand-ins for Zander Buteaux, Fitz Steuber, Danny Kerr and the like, "What is the ideal reason for coming to Pemi?" Once again, Danny's recent "Nothing is impossible" swam back into our ken, but the correct reason for being a camper turned out to be "To have fun, grow as a person, and do things for others." [Editor's question: Was last week's Harrison "Paradise" Potts writing their material?]

Upper 1 tapped Americana with Thomas Bono as a hapless Charlie Brown, moping through "the worst Fourth of July ever" while Miles Donnelly did a spectacular job rendering the appropriate "Peanuts" themes on French Horn. In what



may be the most legally actionable skit of the Pee-rade, U2 then skewered Pemi's reputation by presenting brutal tyrant Jamie Marshman as a counselor who forces his boys to do everything from taking Polar Bears in a bone-chilling lake to playing Frisbee-Running-Bases despite their being "covered with bruises." As a

last straw, this convincing simulacrum of a staff ogre read his charges to sleep thus: "And then the monster tore their heads off and fed them to the kids. Good night!" Yikes! U3 turned to recent *Bean Soups* for the latest number of "Gee Whiz, It's News!" exploring the hypocrisy not only of Charlie Malcolm's recent and totally unexpected concession that lacrosse is not "The Devil's Game" – but also Danny Kerr's alleged banning of peanut butter and sugary drinks in an attempt to horde all such delicacies for himself. U4 closed for the Intermediates with an inventive "Rap about the Pemi Kid," which comically mined TRJR's initial Sunday talk for various silly bits and pieces of Pemi lore.

The Seniors were as creative and risible as they have ever been. S1 set the bar impossibly high with what was, by our count, the day's third evocation of Bakey the Shark. This time, though, the hideous aqueous creature, armed with huge, slathering jaws consisting of a blue Crazy Creek, devoured Danny Kerr and Tom Reed, Jr. before being vanquished by Nature maven Deb Kure (played by

Thompson Bain with a bubbly effusiveness fully worthy of the genuine Deb). Bakey was then duly taken off to the Nature Lodge, no doubt to become part of the "What Is It?" contest. S2 followed with its own eye on tele-culture, presenting "Pemi's So You Think America's Got Idol Dancing with the Voice Stars Talent." The so-called talent? Representations of the improv trio of Dunston, Keys, and Denson, Kenny Moore, Zander Buteaux and the like. Stealing the show, though, was TH Pearson as Jeff Greene, attributing his distinctive voice to having as a youngster been struck in the throat by a toad – and never sounding quite mellifluous since. S3 followed with its "Concise History of America," featuring King George III (played with frightening tyranny and lunacy by Dan Fulham) dispatching Lord Jeffrey Amherst to the Americas not to found a highly selective liberal arts college but rather to slaughter the indigenous natives. (How squeakily post-colonial Pemi has gotten these days!) Best line of the skit goes to James Richardson as a falling Native American: "Ow! Bullets are my only weakness!" Finally, Lake Tent dipped into the history of the nation and the camp alike, representing the Founding Fathers morphing into the Four Docs and deciding that, while it may have been difficult to get everyone to sign on to The Declaration of Independence, putting one's John Hancock to The Declaration of Pemigewasset was a no-brainer. Once again, the creativity and dramatic flair displayed by your sons was little short of breath-taking. We wish you could all have been here to witness it.

The 2011 resumption of the fabled Shrimps vs. Sardines baseball rivalry occupied the Juniors after Rest Hour. (Your humble correspondent captained the Sardines in 1958, while Pemi Board President Peter Fauver led the Shrimps. *Plus ça change!*) Loweres played Barrel Ball and Wiffle Ball, while the Uppers enjoyed assorted lawn games and the Seniors slicked up with sunscreen for a Beach Party. The highlight of the afternoon, though, was the dread Counselor Hunt, when our highly-paid and highly-educated staff flees from the Lodge to find a secure hiding place before hordes of paying customers seek them out like Jack Russells ferreting out a mole. Fun and harmless as it all is, there really is a place in your heart that is reached and racked as you hunker like some helpless critter sought out by waves of yelling boys. You should all try it some time.

Kudos for inventive evasion go to Corey Fauver, who shaved his mountain man-beard and donned female garb in hopes of escaping notice as anything other than a visiting bloomer girl. Unfortunately for Corey, the hunters had seen his "Year of the Beard" video on You Tube (half a million hits and counting – check it out) and knew what he looked like smoothly shorn. Meanwhile music instructor Dorin Dehls donned a Phillies cap and escaped the clutches of one camper who walked up to her, called her "Dude," and then took her word that there were no staff members – male or

female – in sight. So much did Dorin resemble a Senior camper that we're tempted to send her dad a bill for tuition.

Once the ten minutes of chilling pre-dation had ground ever so slowly to a close, the entire camp proceeded to the Senior waterfront, where the captured staff members were obliged to walk the plank on the high dive. Corey was a figure of Isadora Duncan grace as he fluttered towards the waves in his ankle-length chiffon skirt. First prize for the plummet, though, goes to Carlos Yeung, who backed out onto the very edge of the board before delivering a nearly flawless triple back flip, rarely seen and richly applauded by the boys at lakeside. In response to the constant and compelling calls for "Belly flop! Belly flop!" some wisely ignored the pressure, while others took one for the team, bobbing back to the surface amidst gasps and laughter and wild clapping. In sum, a good is vaguely chilling time was had by all.



Evening brought our second all-camp cook-out, and the entire camp family feasted on pulled pork and/or marinated chicken sandwiches while the sun once again painted the valley in warming tones of green. As Division Heads Ted McChesney, Henry Eisenhart, and others finally closed down the grill, the boys wandered towards the Lodge for our annual Fourth of July vaudeville. MC'd by Ian Axness and Corey Fauver (as fresh-faced now as George Stephanopoulos), it was a banner show, kicked off by the awarding of silver Revere bowls for those campers and staff for whom 2011 is their fifth summer at Pemi. This year's cast is comprised of: Ian Axness, Thomas Bono, Daniel Bowes, Harry Cooke, Nancy Cushman, Ned Darling, Betty French, Oliver Kafka, Jamie Nicholas, Ezra Nugiel, Carl Pohlman, Zach Popkin, Daniel Reiff, Chris, Sargent, Will Sargent, Nich Schiciano, Charlie Scott, Per Soderberg, Tommy Tranfo, and Andrew Virden. Now every one of them has an elegant and memory-inducing place to keep their spare change and thumb drives.

The show itself was an extremely entertaining one, launched by the first appearance of the year by the Silver Cornet Band, featuring camper soloists Miles Donnelly, Kevin Lewis, Jackson Smith, Ben Pinheiro, and Noah Belinowitz on Robert Grabill, Jr.'s "Wear Your Pemi Blues" and John Coltrane's "Blue Trane." Pounding out the rhythm was J2 camper Emmanuel Abbey, for whom this was a first-ever

performance on percussion. The show-stealer for serious acts, though, was Thompson Bain, whose smooth and assured rendition of Weezer's "Island in the Sun" brought down the house. We knew Thompson had a guitar, but none of us had a clue of the vocal and instrumental talent he brings from the West Coast. As always, the evening was brought to a rockingly hilarious close by an appearance of "The Little People" – you know, arms as booted feet and your buddy behind you as arms – with Will Clare and Zander Buteux as the hapless demi-Hobbits variously eating, shaving, and brushing their teeth while (behind them under their ponchos) Henry Eisenhart and Ben Walsh did their best to gag them for the public good. Clean-up lasted longer than the act, but the impact made the mayhem well worthwhile. We'd bet a good dozen boys in the audience resolved to return to Pemi as staff simply in order to take up the torch as the next generation of Little Folk.



Well, that seems enough to have said about an especially solid week at Pemi. As noted, the program has really picked up momentum, and the few cases of minor homesickness we witnessed for a few days have dissolved into laughter and smiles and the sweaty brows of active boys. More in seven days or so.

Staff bios were posted on the Pemi Blog, and if you're one of the savvy, you'll have subscribed to the blog by now, so that these epistles and other postings of note are delivered straight to your inbox.

-- Tom and Danny