

Pemigewassett Newsletter

Summer 2011 Number One

“Welcome to Paradise!”

So did Harrison Potts – nine-year-old denizen of Junior Two back for his second summer at Pemi – greet new campers on opening day. It might have sounded like propaganda coming out of the mouth of a counselor (let alone a director), but coming from Harrison, who could question the sincerity? To be honest, its hasn't quite been Paradise yet. The New York/Darien bus broke down on I-91 en route to camp; we've had a little bit of rain now and again; some boys are predictably wrestling with a little homesickness; and Pemi's athletic teams are no longer undefeated in 2011. That being said, Athletic Director Charlie Malcolm quietly observed yesterday evening, “You know, camp has a good feeling.” If you know Charlie, you'll appreciate both his sensitivity to a community's spirit and his high standards. If you don't (yet), you can take our word that his judgment is a good sign.

So what's been happening? Well, JRB Bus Lines got a replacement coach to Putney with reasonable dispatch, and the NY/CT contingent made it to Pemi in time for the traditional inaugural pizza supper. (More on food in a minute!) While they were waiting, however, chaperones Rob Verger, Richard Komson, and their charges were lucky enough to fetch up in the front yard of the West Hill Shop, a bike store right next to the Interstate. The owner not only invited them to make themselves at home on her lawn, she actually brought out cold water for them, throwing in a Frisbee for good measure. The result was the first Official Pemigewassett Frisbee-Running-Bases game ever played outside the state of New Hampshire. Rob and Richard report how great it was to see Pemi kids so primed to be at camp that they were ready to plunge into one of our most sacred rituals seventy miles short of Lower Baker Pond. The other gratifying part of the story, obviously, is the remarkable hospitality of the West Hill folks. Without being cynical, it's hard to imagine a Walmart manager being so thoughtful and, well, “Pemi”!

Saturday evening witnessed the first Campfire of the season – held in the Lodge owing to threatening weather. Talented musicians on our staff from Music Director Ian Axness to outstanding vocalist Dorin Dehls to the new “British Invasion” of Nick and Ben Ridley and Sam Johnson wowed the crowd with their varied stylings, while veteran Improv geni Dwight Dunston and Jeremy Keys were joined by fellow Dickinsonian Sean Denson in a little international skit that brought the house down. Campers played second fiddle to no one, though. Dashiell Slamowitz warmed up for Master Riddler Nathaniel Kaplan with a few brain-teasers of his own, followed by Nathaniel himself. Rookie camper Jakey Cronin strode to the keyboard for a forceful rendition of “The Pink Panther” theme, quickly establishing himself as a true player on the Lower Baker musical scene. Andre Altherr took a night off from his

quirky ditties of yore, but told a few jokes instead, as did Jack Elvekrog and Carter Sullivan. The show was stolen, though, by last June's surprise performer of the year, Robert Loesser, who delivered a cover of Adele's “Rolling in the Deep” with breathtaking presence and technique. For those who hadn't heard Robert, think Simon Cowell hearing Susan Boyle for the first time.



Sunday brought routine health checks, swim tests, and special divisional programs (scavenger hunts, soccer round-robins, and the like) followed by the first all-camp cook-out of the season. The weather was perfect, as the descending sun painted the fields in front of the Mess Hall a glowing green, and Mount Carr stood luminously at the base of our valley like a benevolent parent to us all. Evening brought an illustrated talk on Pemi's history by Tom Reed, Jr., who was struck by how readily and accurately the audience answered his questions on the camp's past. Our veterans know their stuff, and it's fun to watch the new boys get their first real taste of the lore and traditions that complement the range of activities that are camp.

Monday kicked off those activities in earnest, including occupations, athletic contests, trips, and the first number of *Bean Soup's* 102nd volume. 15's Ultimate Frisbee was the first athletic team to hit the pitch, and Charlie Malcolm sounded just the right note announcing the match, acknowledging that no sport surpasses Ultimate in the stress it places on good grace and sportsmanship. “Let's always play hard to win,” Charlie urged, “but Pemi is also known for how high we set the bar for conduct. Make us proud.” Winning two contests and dropping one, the 15s did just that, paced by stellar performances from Dana Wensberg, Sparky Brown, Max Livingstone-Peters, and Dan Fulham. Meanwhile, back at Pemi, the Nature Lodge and Art Center were humming with activity – the former as it always does, the latter with a singularly new vibrancy brought this summer from the West Coast by Arts Head Deb Pannell (mother, actually, of camper Ethan and Staff member Charlie.) Keep an ear cocked to news of Deb's initiatives; early money has her as a threat to match our other Deb, Deb Kure of the Nature Program, in creativity and inspirational energy.

Monday afternoon the first van of hikers rolled out of camp, bound (believe it or not) for Hanover, that trendy little town that hosts Dartmouth College. No, we weren't going to scarf a Vermonster at Ben and Jerry's or hit the Reference Section at Baker Library but rather to walk the first five miles of the Appalachian Trail. It was the first leg of this season's bid to have one or another Pemi person walk every inch of the fabled footpath that lies in the state by closing day. We succeeded in the task a dozen years back, and it seemed like a good time for a repeat. Crossing the bridge over the Connecticut River, the group encountered some challenges that don't normally confront wilderness travelers: cars pulling out of driveways and temporarily splitting the group; having to wait at the corner for

the traffic lights to change. In some ways, though, it was a perfect way to start the trip season, as we quickly moved from the definitely urban space that most of our boys routinely inhabit into woods as varied and lovely as one can encounter in the Granite State. Charlie Scott, Hayden Simmons, Thomas Moore, Bodie Avery, Diego Periel, Crawford Jones, Max Crummy, Pierce Haley, Jakie Cronin, Jamie Acoccella, Wilson Bazant, and Andre Altherr were real troopers on what turned out to be a more arduous walk than had been anticipated, pausing now to remark on the beauty of the sun dappling the russet needles in a piney grove, now to listen to the liquid notes of a hermit thrush ringing through the cooling forest as the afternoon matured. We made it back to camp just in time for supper with legs tired, hands in need of washing, and souls refreshed.

At 7:30 everyone crowded into the Lodge for the inaugural *Bean Soup* of the season – Pemi’s 102-year-old equivalent of *The New Yorker*, *Sportscenter*, and *The Daily Show* combined. Chief Editor Ian Axness (easily as deft with words as he is with notes) was joined by co-editors Peter Siegenthaler and Dwight Dunston in as camper-friendly a first number as we can remember. The trick is to fill the soup tureen with enough goodies to last 45 minutes, and with the boys having been on premises only 48 hours, that’s traditionally been difficult Week One. This year, however, the content was consistently pitched to young and old, rookie and wily veteran alike. We learned about Harrison Pott’s above-mentioned salutations, about the foibles of the management hierarchy at Pemi (in terms that have Danny and Tom’s attorneys exploring the possibility of a libel suit), and about the presence at Pemi of an Invisible Boy that some of us had unaccountably managed to overlook. Look for the bound copy come this December to catch up on the fun yourselves.

Tuesday featured a 10’s soccer tournament at Pemi and 12’s hoops and 13’s baseball at Camp Moosilauke, just up the valley. Results were varied (the 10s, for example, winning the first of three matches, while the 13s mastered their foes 13-4 behind the strong pitching of Hugh Grey, Mac McCaffery, and Zach Leeds.) As usual, though, everyone on the squads saw playing time and the sportsmanship was exemplary. Our oldest and our youngest campers

gathered on the beach after supper for the first of our Big/Little campfires, catered with S’mores and matching Seniors and Juniors, one-on-one, for an evening of cross-generational carbo-loading and companionship. These cordial bonds tend to last the season, mirrored as they are by the strong relationships that develop between those boys who wait table in the Mess Hall and their younger charges. It’s one of the things we think we do well at Pemi, and the infrequency with which it happens in a scholastic setting makes it all the more important to us. As



the Juniors walked back to the Junior Camp, they passed a mammoth Frisbee-Running-Bases game just wrapping up on Intermediate Hill – less formal than the campfire but engaging Lower and Upper Intermediates alike in Pemi’s signature hybrid sport.

As you can see, lots of traditional things have been transpiring at Pemi. We’ve witnessed a few innovations as well. Jeff Greene has brought in “Beach Tennis” for the first time, supplementing his popular and highly successful “regular” program with yet another sport that adds to our suspicion that everything cool comes from Malibu or Venice Beach and is designed to turn the rest of America into East California. More consequentially (if you can believe it!), Pemi has for the first time in its history hired a food service, and the results (whether one considers the quality or quantity of the meals coming out of the kitchen – or alternatively the cheerful and professional ambience in that same kitchen) seem likely to exceed our hopes and expectations. We’ll let your little and bigger gourmets be the judges, but the re-launching of *Chez Pemi* is most promising.

Other innovations? A new office wing that finally makes the Lodge look more like Notre Dame than Chartres (though scarcely like either, if truth be told.) A new morning calisthenic dubbed “The Pemi Kid.” (Ask *your* Pemi Kid!) A new route for distance swims (on which perhaps more will follow)! But when all is said and done, Pemi is in David Byrne’s immortal words “Same as it ever was” – with a little more horsepower injected by all the boys and staff who are with us for the first time, inspiring even the most jaded veterans with the zeal of the recent convert. Charlie’s right. Camp has a good feel. We’re glad to be here – in what is at least a semi-Paradise.

Two more notes. First, some of you may have received in the last day or so what we in the camping industry call “The Letter.” Whatever its specifics, it paints a relatively less rosy picture of camp’s opening than this epistle has done, and it is often scribed by boys who naturally miss the warmth and love and familiarity of their own homes. For every five boys who have sent “The Letter,” four are by now most likely feeling completely adjusted and leaping from bed every morning with the proverbial glad cry. Most of the others will be there in a day or so. Just remember that when they are happy and engaged, the last thing they think of is writing home. If they experience a down moment, picking up pen and paper is their first reflex. Enough said, perhaps. As always, though, if you have any doubts and concerns, please be in touch with Danny, Dottie, or Tom. That’s why we’re here.

Stay tuned for 2011’s staff bios, in which Pemi’s talented and committed staff introduce themselves in their own words. Happy reading!

-- Tom and Danny