

Camping Without Advisors?

by Don Stephen

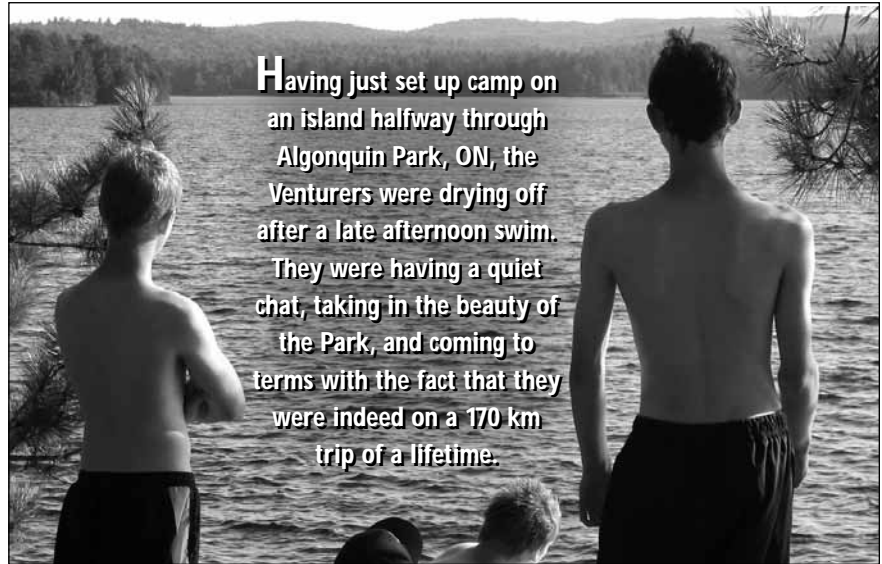
“We’d like to go camping without any advisors...”

I couldn’t believe what I had just heard.

“They want to go camping without...without...advisors?” I heard my inside voice cry out in disbelief. After all those years in the troop camping as a team, and last year during the company’s first year of operation when we tagged along on their adventures because they weren’t old enough yet to drive, they now want to...leave us behind? Go on a hike camp, and relegate us to... just looking at our camping gear sitting in the basement?

I had heard that this someday might happen, but obviously I was unprepared for it. I glanced over at Scouter Doug to see how he was coping with the news. I could tell he knew what was on my mind... “How did it come to this, so quickly? It just seemed like yesterday that these young adults were learning how to set up a tent, paddle a canoe, cook gourmet slop, hang a bear line, and find their way in the woods.”

The reply in his eyes reflected the many more years of program experience that I didn’t have and I knew he was right. Without actually hearing him, I knew what he was thinking... “Last year, as 15 year olds, they canoed the entire width of Algonquin Park, after planning and executing



Having just set up camp on an island halfway through Algonquin Park, ON, the Venturers were drying off after a late afternoon swim. They were having a quiet chat, taking in the beauty of the Park, and coming to terms with the fact that they were indeed on a 170 km trip of a lifetime.

Photo: Don Stephen

the whole project by themselves. Sure, we went along just to make sure the Crooked Chute on the Petawawa River didn’t swallow them up, but they could have done it by themselves...after all, that’s what we had been training them for all these years. Right? Right?”

Right. As I sat in the meeting room listening to them plan the first camp of the year, sans advisors, I slowly started to acknowledge that indeed, this is why we had been working with them for all those years. They were about to take their first steps as a true Venturer company, and profit from all the experience that the Scouting program had been equipping them with since their first years as Beavers. Yes...they could go camping by themselves if they

wanted to, and it was our job to ensure they got the help to do it safely. But what, exactly, did we have to do to make it legal? Good question.

Steps to Take

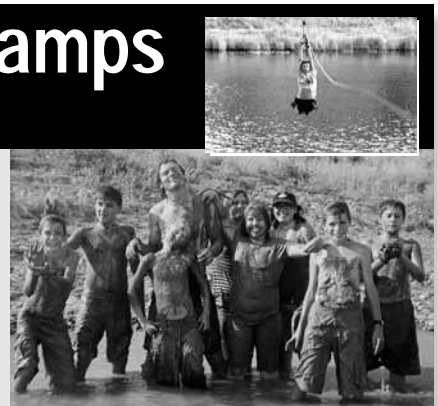
A quick search through the Bylaw, Policies & Procedures (B.P.&P.) manual on Scouts Canada’s web site later that evening revealed that our current company procedures had left us in pretty good shape. Section 10001.4 indicated “Venturers may hold short-term/long-term camps without adult leadership, providing each youth has obtained permission of a parent or guardian and the approval of the advisor.” Section 10006.1 detailed the requirements regarding the necessary risk management process.



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Because the new Program Participation Enrollment Form covered all the necessary parental permissions for this short camp, and because our company had continued the documentation process established in the troop regarding risk management, I felt confident that we were off to a good start with respect to B.P.&P. Just to make sure, the next day I called the Program Help Line (1-800-339-6643) at Scouts Canada to verify my understanding of the rules. Headquarters took my question, and confirmed the above references. In addition to the discussion of the legal issues, they also provided very useful feedback to my other concerns regarding this first "Advisor Free" Venturer camp.

Somewhere in this process it occurred to me that there was one potential group who might not know, or possibly approve, of a mixed group of 15 and 16 year old teenagers heading off into the woods to go camping by themselves...the parents. Realizing that some of the parents might not even be aware that their signature on the enrollment form granted their daughters and sons permission to do this type of activity, I decided to give them all a call and explain the situation. With positive reactions from all parents involved, I was starting to feel a little more comfortable.

Advisor Free

Based on my experience, I would recommend that other advisors in this situation for the first time create a checklist that looks something like this:

- Review Section 10001.4 of the B.P.&P. manual for the parental consent required.
- Review Section 10006.1 for the risk management process required, and compare it to the process you already have in place. (It must be thorough, as you will be approving the safety aspects of the camp based primarily on this document!)
- Review Section 10007, "Acceptable Practices for Specific Outdoor Scouting Activities" and review specific competencies (such as hiking or canoeing).
- Remember that as there isn't an advisor or adult present, the youth need to ensure their enrollment form with their medical information is on hand. As well, a youth member must have first aid training and first aid equipment appropriate for the outdoors and be designated the "First Aider" (as found in B.P.&P., Section 10002).

- Contact the parents and advise them of the company's plans. If there are any concerns that might preclude a Venturer from taking part in the camp, do your best to promote the leadership and maturity of your older members and the experience that the company has acquired during their Scouting years. If necessary, plan for some adults to camp within radio contact of the company, justifying it to the youth using the emergency transportation argument.
- Ensure that all of the usual required forms are completed, and delivered. (Our company created a Paperwork Guide, and posted it on our web site. The document is a step-by-step guide that lists the contents and structure of the risk management paperwork, the camping forms required, and the process that must be followed to have a camp approved by the advisors and the group.)

How Did it all Turn Out?

As usual, the company met the camp planning challenge with enthusiasm and spirit. The event went off without a hitch, and plans for the next camp were already being discussed on the drive back to the city.

Will the company ever invite the advisors back for a camp, for old times' sake? Will our water pumps, mats, and headlamps ever see their way out of the basement again? We're not sure, but can take comfort in the fact that the Scout troop one day might need some recycled old Scouters. Old Scouters who like to go camping... X

- Scouter Don Stephen is an advisor with the 1st Kanata Venturer Company. He and his fellow advisors, Doug and George, can usually be found on weekends sitting on the curbside, with their gear all packed, wishing for a Scouting trip. Give them a call if you've got extra room in your car and you're going to a camp.

Scouts Can Camp Alone Too

Scouts can go camping on their own as well. B.P.&P., Section 10001.3 states: "Troop Scouters may approve patrol size group of Scouts (two to ten) holding short-term camps without adult leadership, providing each Scout has obtained permission from a parent or guardian."

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