



Backpacking with Troop 336



Hartselle, AL
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My Backpacking History

- I was a youth in 336 through the 1990s, learned to backpack in the Troop.
- I didn't take a single overnight backpacking trip between aging out of the Troop and joining back as an adult leader with my son 20 years later.
- As an adult leader, I've been one of the handful of adults who takes the boys on the backpacking trips.
 - Everyone else pitches in for the "car camps" the rest of the year :-)
- Non-Scouting: In 2021, hiked 27 miles through the Grand Canyon with my son and a group of friends. "Rim to Rim".
 - It about killed me.



Troop 336 Backpacking

- Most of our Winter camping trips are Backpacking.
 - November to February
- We typically plan 4 and make 3 trips per year.
- Cold weather camping - hiking keeps you warm.
- Don't have to worry about insects or snakes.



Preparation

- Most campouts are done using Patrol method. Backpacking trips, we each plan and pack our own food.
 - Exceptions when someone needs to work as a group for a requirement.
- Several weeks before backpacking “season” starts, we spend a few meetings preparing.
 - The older boys plan a “good pack” / “bad pack” demonstration.
 - Gives the boys a chance to show off their gear.
 - Anyone who hasn’t gone before brings their pack in for an inspection.
 - With enough time left to get anything they’re missing.
- Often when scouts age out, they pass their gear along to the troop (especially backpacks), so we can help scouts to backpack who otherwise wouldn’t be able to get the gear.

Preparation

- Anyone who shows themselves ready to backpack can go, even first-year Scouts.
- Sometimes, if there is a group who wants to backpack and a group that doesn't, or is not ready, or doesn't have the equipment, we break into a hiking group and a "base camp" group.
 - Cheaha is good for this.
 - This happened more in the past when the Troop was bigger.

Philmont

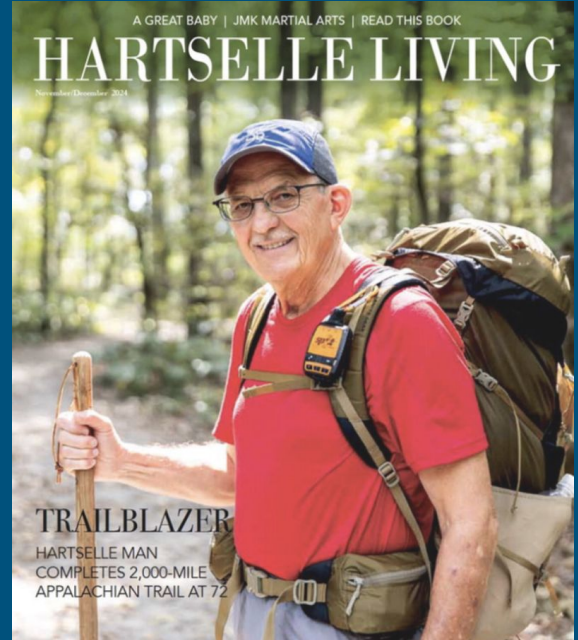
- The Troop has sent several treks to Philmont.
- Most recent 2023 - my son led the trek and I was adult advisor.
- 7-day trek, 5 boys and 2 leaders. (One had just turned 18, counted as youth for the trip).
- Because we backpack all winter every year, we felt well prepared - did not take any additional “break in” hikes.
- The memory of that Grand Canyon hike – and the need to “make weight” (Philmont has strict weight requirements to allow you to go) spurred me start exercising. I lost 50 pounds, much of which I’ve kept off.



Anthony Hood

- Anthony Hood was an adult leader in 336 for 30 years, led many backpacking trips.
- Last year, he completed a section hiking the Appalachian Trail at age 72.

2190 miles.



Our Usual Spots - Bankhead

- Big Tree
 - 5 miles in, 5 back out, from Borden Trailhead
 - That's the southern route. There's a northern route; I've never been on it.
 - Easiest hike we do. There's a half mile that is really steep right near the trailhead, so the hike ends with a challenging climb that ends at the vehicles - some of the boys race each other up, others challenge each other.
 - A half mile past the campsites, the trail ends in a canyon with the oldest tree in Alabama - started growing before our nation was founded.
 - We usually spend a half hour or so near the tree for the boys to play on the rocks and under the waterfall.
 - We usually get a picture or video showing how many boys it takes to put their arms around the tree.



Our Usual Spots - Bankhead Cont.

- Fall Creek Falls
 - Also starts at Borden Trailhead
 - Troop has been several times - somehow I missed every one of those. Never been.
- Pine Torch Loop
 - Went once.
 - Meant to be a quick 3 miles in, 3 miles out.
 - Wrong turn early put is on the wrong side of the loop - 8 miles in, 3 out.
 - Mixed use trail (horses) - nice to run across several groups of hikers and horse riders, but the trail was *really* hard to hike.
 - We hit the camp site and everybody was out by 6 pm.
 - One of the scouts, 13 at the time, had a *really* rough time on those 8 miles. Five years later he went to Philmont with us, did great there, and is about to start his second summer of working staff at Philmont.

Our Usual Spots - Scottsboro

- Walls of Jericho

- ~4 miles down, 4 up
 - 1300 ft of elevation change
- Trail is in good condition, but with slippery rocks if it's been raining.
- Another mile from the campsite back to the walls. A box canyon towering hundreds of feet on either side.
- We usually go in the winter.
- Once we went in early November, and there were more people there, higher water, and some were swimming (water was way too cold for us though).
- Neat experience one February:
 - Near the trailhead, the fog was so thick we couldn't see the trees lining the road as we drove up.
 - Winter wonderland for the first mile of the hike - icicles hanging from every branch, thick fog.
 - As we hiked down, we crossed the condensation line - the fog was now a cloud above us, raining on us the rest of the way down.



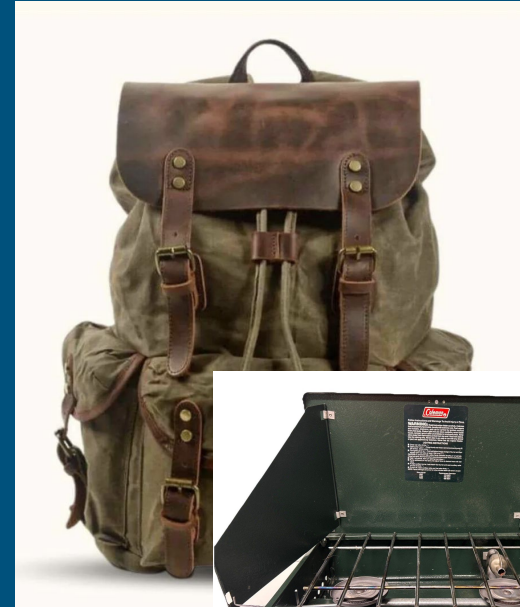
Our Usual Spots - Birmingham

- Cheaha
 - Our usual path: 6 miles in, 6 miles out
 - Challenging
 - Bouldering
 - Several great overlooks to stop and rest or have lunch
 - Remains of a small crashed plane (1960s) along the route.



Anecdotes

- One year the first trip was all older boys, mostly experienced, and we skipped the prep meetings.
- A 15 year old new Scout who had never hiked before showed up with:
 - A 30 year old heavy pack
 - A full Coleman stove strapped to the back.



Anecdotes

- My son hiked every trip for 7 years carrying a guitar, singing and playing while we hiked.
 - Including Philmont.

