

VENTURING MAGAZINE

What is this thing called Kodiak?

January 2012



Back in 1998, at the birth of Venturing as a young adult program separate from traditional Exploring, there was recognition that we needed our own leadership training. In 2001, that dream was realized with the newly introduced Nature of Leadership Treks. There were two treks that year, one at Philmont National Scout Ranch in NM and one on the Yukon River in Alaska. The treks lasted one week each, and included daily discussions groups, leadership skills exercises, and debriefs each evening. This program was sponsored by the National Office in Irving, TX and promoted with print materials provided to each of BSA's local councils. The two treks were filled to capacity and were each successful in its own way. The Philmont Trek was small by necessity, as backpacking is naturally a small group activity. The Yukon River Trek had 24 participants from all over the US and included post-trek activities and celebration in Fairbanks, AK. Here is a link to the original Scouting Magazine about the Yukon River Trek:

<http://www.scoutingmagazine.org/issues/0205/index.html>

In 2002, local councils were encouraged to run their own nature of Leadership Treks, promoted by the National Office through scouting Magazine and print materials. One of those was a weeklong, 100 mile whitewater rafting trip down Oregon's Deschutes River. Others included backpacking treks in the Rocky Mountains and a sea kayak adventure on the South Carolina Coast. The Course Syllabus remained unchanged for that second year, but began a series of revisions form year to year including a name change to Kodiak Leadership Skills Course. Later, the follow-on course called Kodiak X was added. Local Councils and even individual Venturing Crews started holding Kodiak Treks. The syllabus was offered to community groups such as church youth groups and there was a large number of Course Director's Conferences held all over the US to teach adults how to manage the delivery of the course plan.



Recently, Kodiak has been merged into the larger Boy Scout training continuum and is offered to both older Boy Scouts and Venturers. It is no longer an exclusive Venturing Program and some of the course prerequisites now pose a problem for Venturers who want to participate in this course as they aren't universally available. A Crew that wants to conduct its own Kodiak Trek must first conduct an Introduction to Leadership Skills Course or attend a Council sponsored National Youth Leadership Training Course (or both). A more subtle problem is that courses offered simultaneously to Venturers and Boy Scouts are often not friendly to coed attendees. Course Director Conferences are no longer widely offered, and in general enthusiasm for Kodiak Courses has waned over the past two years. The Kodiak X Course has been eliminated altogether.

There Have Been All Kinds of Treks

Since the first Nature of Leadership Treks, backpacking and river running have been at the top of the list of activities that draw participants to Kodiak. Other popular activities have been kayaking tours, bicycle treks, theme park tours, and other forms of road trips. In a Crew sponsored trek, the sky is the limit. The training lends itself very well to travel, and because the material is generally delivered in discussion groups where nothing more than a log to sit on is necessary. The trust activities can be done on a beach, in a campsite, or even at a rest area on the interstate.

My experience with this program has all been on river trips. We usually have our first sessions in the morning while breakfast is being prepared. Our team discussions are often held while floating flat sections of a river. We try to keep the teams all in the same boats to facilitate discussions and to build team cohesion. Many times, though, members of the Kodiak Teams will ask to spend some time hanging out with members of their own Crews, so we often declare free time when the boat teams can mix it up. This is also necessary when we get out our inflatable kayaks since kayakers can't really participate with the boat teams. Many of our trust activities are also conducted in the boats, where we have developed some really meaningful trust events that usually result in whole boat teams falling overboard.



Kodiak 2010 on Idaho's Salmon River

Like Politics, All Scouting is Local

Let's face the facts; if the kids in your local community are going to get an opportunity to attend a Kodiak Leadership Skills Trek, they are going to have to plan and execute the course themselves. A big part of the latest syllabus requires participants to get involved in planning the trek. National Council and most Local Councils are no longer interested in conducting this training, and even Course Directors Conferences are few and far between. It has been suggested that the Kodiak CDC could be offered by distance learning. A series of webinars or an online course with a multiple choice test, or even an Excel spreadsheet would do the trick. The problem is that someone, somewhere has to take the initiative, and then someone, somewhere has to approve it. This is a problem with Crew level Kodiak Courses as well. A properly conducted course requires approval by the local Council Executive. In some cases, this is only a formality. In other cases, it requires the presentation of a plan along with credentials of the Course Director. In other case, such approval is simply not forthcoming. Ordinarily, the home Council of the Course Director is the best place to start looking for authorization. I have been on Kodiak Treks approved in 5 different Councils run by 4 different Course Directors. Each was unique, in a unique location, and each, I hope, changed some young peoples' lives.

The magic in Kodiak is that it is a fun, challenging week of fellowship that includes leadership training. Most other leadership skills courses are just the opposite; leadership courses with fun and fellowship sprinkled in. It is easy to get a Crew or a teen to sign up for a week of summer high adventure, and if the leadership training is well integrated into the experience, it can be a real highlight of a young person's teen years. It is also easier to get parents to fund a weeklong trek if there is some worthwhile training included. Many of the participants in our past Kodiak Treks are still Facebook friends years later. There have been several road trips up and down the pacific Coast by our Crew alumni to visit old Kodiak friends. Kodiaks are fun for the adult staff and the Crew Leaders, too. We have many friendships that started during Kodiak Treks.

Longer Term benefits of conducting Kodiak Treks in Your Crew

A surprise benefit of running an annual Kodiak Trek in your Crew is that your older Venturers can take over the course instruction and trek leadership after the first year. This is where the longest lasting impressions are made. Young people who learn to teach leadership skills will take TWO new skills along for the rest of their lives. The first is the material that they have been taught, and then internalized when they taught it to their younger peers. The second is the self-assurance they will gain by becoming leaders in a very real sense in some kind of adventure. The kids from my home Crew have all become certified whitewater guides. A few of them have gone on to become paid guides during the summer rafting season, and several of them have gone on to become certified Whitewater Guide Instructors. For two years straight, our Crew won the High School Cup at the annual Oregon River Games, one of our young women won the Women's Pro-Guide Cup one year, and one of our young men won the Men's Solo Inflatable Kayak Cup another year. All of these kids enter adulthood with some real world success and real world self-assurance that they would never have gotten elsewhere. Some of our other kids learned how to run a very large (cooking for up to 60 people) portable kitchen and to run a sanitary food service in the outback. Our treks always emphasized skills such as food handling, proper sanitation, water purification, and Leave No Trace Camping. These are all valuable skills, but more important, they teach young people that the sky is the limit of what they can accomplish when they apply themselves. In the Kodiak world, they learn this is a laboratory rather than in a classroom.

Kodiak Resources

Here are some valuable resources for planning and leading a Kodiak Trek:
Course Syllabus and Leaders Guide:

[http://www.scouting.org/filestore/training/pdf/Kodiak Challenge FINAL 2011 - Item Number 511-014.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/training/pdf/Kodiak_Challenge_FINAL_2011_-_Item_Number_511-014.pdf)

Introduction to Leadership Skills Course Handbook:

<http://www.scouting.org/filestore/training/pdf/511-013WB.pdf>

Crew Stories:

<http://www.sageventure.com/venturing/NVYC/KodiakXpedition.pdf>

<http://www.sageventure.com/venturing/NVYC/SalmonRiverKodiakAdventure06.pdf>

<http://www.sageventure.com/venturing/NVYC/KodiakOnTheSalmonRiver06.pdf>

<http://www.sageventure.com/venturing/NVYC/KodiakCampFife.pdf>