

VENTURING MAGAZINE

Planning that Superactivity with your Crew by Joe Garrett

May 2012

One of the long serving traditions we Venturers inherited from Exploring is the annual superactivity. This is an annual, multiday event that drives our annual program plan. It is usually a backcountry experience or a road trip, but can be almost any activity that your Crew decides will be worth spending a year preparing for. Three of my favorites over the years have been whitewater raft trips, backpack/climbing trips, and road trips. In the old Exploring program, superactivities were a central part of a Post's annual planning and determined the necessary training, fund raising, and activities for the year. The choice of a superactivity by the Post Officers set the theme for the year, and affected recruiting, too. In venturing we have lost this tradition with its emphasis on the Big Idea and as a result, I'm afraid, we may have lost our imagination about what can be accomplished on a shoestring.

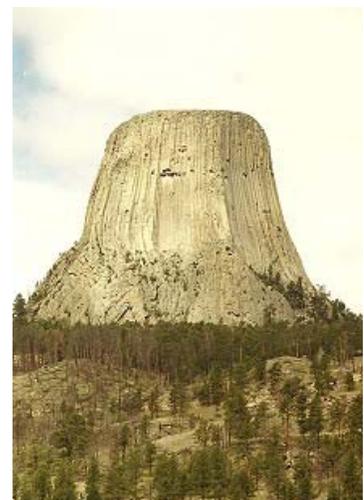
In 1999 my newly minted Venturing Crew (an Explorer Post that had been "rebranded" as a Venturing Crew on August 1, 1998, Venturing's birthday) took the mother of all road trips. We travelled from Seattle, WA to the Black Hills of South Dakota along Interstate 90, and then returned along I-84 which retraces the old Oregon Trail. We visited every National Park and National Historic Park along the way. We saw Yellowstone, Grand Teton, Custer Battlefield, Mount Rushmore, and many more significant places.

In 2007, we travelled to Skagway, AK on the Alaska Highway and hiked the 37 mile Klondike National Historic Trail from Dyea, AK over Chilkoot Pass to Lake Bennett, British Columbia and then rode the world famous White Pass & Yukon Railroad back down White Pass to Skagway. The trip north through British Columbia and Yukon was almost as much fun as the backpacking trek.

More recently, in 2010, my Crew went whitewater rafting on Idaho's Lower Salmon River, traversing 50 miles to its confluence with the Snake River followed by 25 miles on this bigger river to the take out at Heller Bar, Washington. On this trip we camped in three different States on three consecutive nights. We spent the first three nights of the trip in Idaho, then spent a night on the west bank of the Snake River in Oregon, and the final night on the same side of the river in Washington. This trip took by far the most preparation, training, and practice of three examples, and has become an annual event for us. Occasionally we host Friends and Family raft trips so our Venturers can show off their guiding skills and talents to their parents.

Road Trip!

In the fall of 1998, Venturing Crew 800 of Kenmore, WA attended a presentation about the plight of the Lakota Sioux of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Pine Ridge had been the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre which is widely viewed as an act of reprisal for the battle has become known as Custer's Last Stand. Shannon County, where the town of Pine Ridge is located is one of the poorest counties in the United States. Alcoholism and unemployment are huge social problems in this community and there are few resources for Lakota youth.



Our Crew decided that it would be fun and rewarding to go to Pine Ridge and conduct a weeklong Scout style camp for the young people there. We laid out elaborate plans for feeding and entertaining about 60 young people and their adult chaperones, and started gathering funds and equipment for such a large project. Unfortunately, we did not have adequate onsite support or credibility in South Dakota to make this work, so a few weeks before our departure date, we had to cancel. Left with a week blocked out, food and equipment ready to go, and a transportation plan, we decided to go visit the community anyway. Each of our Venturers had been required to read either the book "Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee" or "Neither Wolf nor Dog" in order to get some perspective on our trip, so they were still keenly interested in the history and culture we would encounter there. We usually try to have some kind of reading assignment before a big trip. The year before this, when we went on a canoe trip on the Upper Missouri River where Lewis and Clark had explored Central Montana, we had everyone (adults included) read "Undaunted Courage", a book about the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery written by Stephen Ambrose. Year later when we hiked the Chilkoot Pass, we had everyone read "White Fang" and "Call of the Wild", both by Jack London, and we read aloud "The Cremation of Sam Magee" by Robert Service several times along the trail.

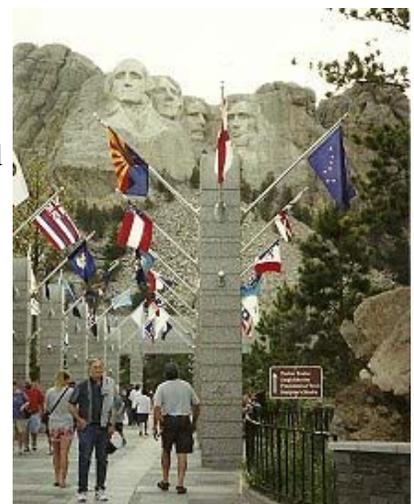


The planning for this road trip started about six months before the event. Normally I would suggest starting the planning process a full year ahead of time. This is not because it takes a year to prepare such a trip, but because the superactivity itself can become the center of your planning, elections, and activities for the year preceding the event. If you hold your Crew Officers elections at the end of the school year, as we do, the first act of your officers-elect can be to begin planning for the next school year. The first event they should decide on is

the final even of their next summer, the superactivity. Every event, fundraiser, training event, and recruiting event can then be planned in order to support, and to take advantage of the BIG Event.

In our case, a 9 day road trip became the plan after our summer camp idea fell through. Having a planning or event failure can be a big learning opportunity, too, by the way. It is important that it not be perceived as a personal failure of the Crew, though, and any program failure needs to be quickly followed up with a success. In our case, quickly replacing our summer camp service project with a road trip to visit as many National parks as possible in a 9 day period served as a huge success for the Crew.

Our first planning item was to plan our route and decide what we wanted out of the experience. Since the trip had been inspired by an interest in the history of the Lakota Sioux, we decided that we would visit the Custer Battlefield on the way to South Dakota and visit Wounded Knee, the Black Hills, and the Badlands while retelling the events that had happened at each of these places. We also decided to visit the giant Chief Sitting Bull monument that is under construction in the Black Hills. It is located near Mt. Rushmore so that place got added to the list as well even though it has little to do with the history of the Sioux people.





Next was budget planning. With a rough itinerary in mind, we could estimate our fuel costs and start planning where we would spend each night, adding into the budget the costs of our campsites. Our food budget was somewhat independent of the itinerary, and we usually budget with a dollar amount per day per person. Some research was necessary to determine entrance fees for all the places we planned to visit, and this required a more complete itinerary. It was time to break out the road atlas. Our route would generally follow Interstate 90 east from Seattle to Rapid City, SD. Then we would drive south through the Black Hills and the Pine

Ridge Reservation. On the southern border of Pine Ridge, we would enter Nebraska and the Oregon Trail country. One of the youth suggested that we visit Carhenge while in Nebraska and we discovered that it was right in our path. Carhenge is a reproduction of Stonehenge made out of old cars partially buried in a Nebraska cornfield. The story is that Carhenge is the result of a big family reunion, plenty of adult beverages, some farm equipment, and a bunch of derelict cars in a pasture. It was well worth the stop, and the only Dairy Queen for at least a hundred miles in any direction is right down the road.

Here is a partial list of the places our youth chose to visit: Grant-Kohrs Ranch National Historic Site, Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, Little Bighorn Battlefield, Wind Cave National Park, Badlands National Park, Devils Tower National Monument, and the Oregon national Historic Trail. It took several weeks to compile this list. It took longer to schedule our camping spots appropriately, and it was a chore to stay on schedule. Surprise events such as a massive thunder and lightning storm in the grasslands of Nebraska added a hint of danger to our adventure. Driving through South Pass on the Oregon Trail, the lowest of the passes across the Rocky Mountains and visiting Independence Rock where all wagon trains stopped for a break, added a sense of history.



Planning is Half the Fun

Here is how we planned our Crew's year using this superactivity:

1. Elections in June, just before school year ends.
2. Officers-elect pick a superactivity for the following year.
3. Program planning conference occurs sometime during the summer with officers elect.
4. Officers-elect take office immediately after this year's superactivity.
5. Recruiting season begins with resumption of regular Crew meetings in September.
6. Serious planning for superactivity begins in October, after school year program calendar is published.
7. Fund raising for superactivity is planned.

8. Any necessary training is arranged and scheduled (this would include things like scuba lessons, or backpacking shakedown treks). It also might include First Aid certification, map reading or other skills that will be needed.
9. In February or March, a second recruiting campaign might be launched to fill the upcoming superactivity.
10. At some point in the March timeframe, it is important to have commitments from participants. This is usually in the form of a large, non-refundable deposit. Without this commitment, your logistics will inevitably spin out of control. Teens will also learn to wait until the last minute to commit if you keep the trip open to newcomers too late in the school year. This is very destructive to the crew's cohesion and disheartening to those who have committed and participated in planning and especially fund raising.
11. Pay special attention to communicating your expectations of your group. This includes written personal equipment lists, making certain everyone has proper identification, permission slips, spending money, and a copy of your code of conduct for the trip.
12. If you are willing to spend a week of your vacation with your Venturers, you can have an adventure of a lifetime. It is fun, challenging, and rewarding all at the same time. Through my years of volunteering as a Crew (and Explorer Post) Advisor, I have had the opportunity to climb the Middle Teton in Wyoming, Mt. Rainier in Washington, Long's Peak in Colorado, Chilkoot Pass in Alaska, and Mt. Hood in Oregon. I have canoed or rafted Montana's Upper Missouri and Flathead Rivers, Alaska's Yukon River, Idaho's Salmon and Snake Rivers, the Colorado River in Utah and Arizona, the Deschutes and Rogue Rivers in Oregon, and the Klamath River in California. I have backpacked the Grand Canyon, Philmont National Scout Ranch, the Adirondacks in NY, the Cascades in Washington and Oregon, and Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado.

Use your imagination and have a great time. Use this opportunity to enrich your own life, the life of your family and the lives of the Venturers who are looking to you as a role model. Venturing Advisor is one of the greatest jobs on the planet, and if you allow it to, it will shape your life in new and unexpected ways.

If you will be planning a trip outside of the US, a good planning reference is www.sageventure.com/venturing/planning.html. This write up was done after Craig took his Crew to Austria to an International Scout Hiking Expedition in the Austrian Alps. You can read more about that activity at crews.sageventure.com/Austria/