

VENTURING MAGAZINE

Wet 'n Wild in the Great Smoky Mountains

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On Friday, August 8th, five youth and six adults from Crew 5 in Wake Forest, NC headed out at 8:00 am for a Whitewater Super Activity weekend near Bryson City, NC. After a five hour (5) drive through the mist, fog and heavy rain, we arrived in downtown Bryson City. After a quick stop for a couple of group pictures of the youth and the adults on a nearby Great Smoky



Mountain Railroad caboose, we dashed through the drizzle towards lunch at a nearby deli called The Filling Station Deli and Sub Shop.

While waiting for our lunch to be made, a few of our scouts and adults went in search of a geocache on the caboose where we took our pictures (they found it). Since the deli shop was so small, we ate our lunch under the awning outside trying to stay as dry as the skies opened up with another downpour.

After finishing up our lunch and hoping that the rain would let up, we headed up the road towards the Deep Creek area to see if we could do our first planned activity of tubing down the Deep Creek Gorge. Unfortunately, the creek had risen so fast from the downpour and because they had to rescue several people from the creek, they closed the creek to tubing for the afternoon. So we loaded back up and headed up the mountain towards the Wildwater Limited Group Lodge (wildwaterrafting.com/locations/) to check in, check the weather and figure out what we wanted to do with the rest of our afternoon. While we settled in, the rain faded away, so we decided to head back down the mountain to the Deep Creek (www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/deepcreek.htm) area in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park where we hiked for two miles along the Deep Creek Trails visiting the Juney Whank Falls, The Tom Branch Falls and the



Indian Creek Falls. This also gave us a chance to scope out the upper "whitewater" section and the lower section of the creek which flows from the Indian Creek through the narrow Deep Creek Gorge. During our hike, we came upon a pair of blue Nike shoes that someone had left sitting on a rock near the creek. We wondered who would have left their wet shoes on that rock and gave us a great prompt to make up stories along the hike. We wondered if they would still be there when we returned and found them to be gone when we passed by that way again. After our nice hike, we headed back up the mountain to our lodge to enjoy a great dinner cooked by the female youth in our contingent and then hit our bunks for a good night's sleep.





We woke up to a misty, drizzly morning, had a great breakfast prepared by our male youth and headed back down the mountain to the Great Smoky Mountains Railroad (www.gsmr.com) where we boarded the open Fontana rail car for a two hour excursion over 22 miles traveling along the Tennessee and Natchala Rivers to the Natchala Gorge. Upon arrival at the Wildwater drop off point, we



left the train and boarded the bus beginning our afternoon whitewater trip on the very cold (48 degrees) Natchala River. After a great BBQ lunch provided by our outfitter, we donned our gear, took our safety briefing and hit the freezing water for an eight mile run down Class I and II rapids. While the adults let our Guide, Emily, handle the boat all along the trip, well...except for when she leapt out of the boat, ran alongside of us on the bank going down the river and then leapt back into the raft (her first successful attempt at that trick all summer long), the Guide in the youth's raft let Joe and Austin be their raft's guide for a good portion of the float trip. Their Guide, Mark, believes in letting the youth learn by doing (hmmmm...sounds like Scouting).



It was a great first whitewater rafting experience for a number of our youth and at least one adult as we rafted through the mist/fog. But, we weren't quite done with the water yet as those tubes were calling our names. So, after picking up our vehicles back in town, we headed back to the Deep Creek area for a little tubing. After the 1 mile hike to the very last point where the park lets you put in, we spent the next hour floating over the rocks (we got stuck too) back down to our tubing outfitter (www.greatsmokies.com/tubing.php). Fully saturated and satisfied with our day on the water, we pick up pizzas from Anthony's Italian Restaurant that we enjoyed on the porch of our Lodge. As we were eating our delicious dinner, Gray mentioned that it was a great idea that we planned to get pizza because he thought we were all too tired to cook dinner.



Sunday morning found us having breakfast a little later than the boys had planned (maybe too much fun the day before), but we made our 10:30 am check out time. Then it was off to our last watery adventure at Sliding Rock in the Pisgah National Forest near Brevard, NC. After a several of trips down the 50 ft. natural water slide into a 8 foot deep pool of VERY COLD water, including one run with five of us going down at the same time, we dried off and headed back to Wake Forest/Raleigh in the rain (of course) (www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/nfsnc/recreation/recarea/?recid=48156&actid=82)

Our crew of five youth and six adults accomplished all of the activities that were planned, experienced several firsts and even squeezed in an extra waterfall hike and geocache during the weekend. A big thank you goes to our Activity Chair, Austin Blackwood, for planning Crew 5's very first super fun Super Activity!

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