A NEW KILCOO REUNION

Four friends fine tune thier tripping skills on a canoe adventure

In 1961 four Kilcoo Alumni really met for the first time, and some would say that because of the so called chemistry among them that Kilcoo was not the same for at least the next six to seven years. This past summer the four former campers and staff reunited and set out on a great adventure.

1961 was the first year that Bob 'Smoothie' Slingerland, Paul Chamberlain, Jamie McAlpine, and I reluctantly shared the shores of Gull Lake. That year Chief invited Bob 'Smoothie' Slingerland to Kilcoo as a swimming instructor. Paul, who started at camp in '57, was a member of staff in cabin 18, and came to know 'Smoothie' as a competent and great new Staff member for the Kilcoo waterfront. The quiet and reserved Jamie McAlpine, who had arrived at camp in 1953 at the tender age of seven who had already made a name for himself in the annals of Kilcoo history, signed up for Chief's great experiment, the 'Super Seniors', along with Tom Chown, Norm Lord, Russell Skuta, Jack Richardson and myself. Needless to say, I was equally as excited as Jamie at the prospect of being without a counselor for the month.

Without a counsellor we took great delight in telling 'Smoothie' what he could do with his compulsory first period morning swim instruction classes and much to Bob's chagrin, rarely showed up. Bob, as one could imagine had little love for the Super Seniors, as did Paul Chamberlain (and the rest of the staff) who got his first real introduction to us when he was 'directed elsewhere' (censored) by myself, when on an emergency medical mission to the infirmary for another camper.

As the summers went by Paul and I discovered among many things that we first had met at Camp Glenokawa in 1956; 'Smoothie' discovered that McAlpine and I, now staff, weren't so bad after all, and that the four of us, in spite of the pranks that we pulled on one another, were glad to be friends and a small part of a great place known as Kilcoo.

One of the common loves of three of us was tripping. Bob, on the other hand had had little experience in this field. As tripper in 1965 and Chief directed me to send all staff out on a two day 'survival' trip in pre-camp with only map, compass, a little food and possibly a canoe or two, Bob did not react overly well to this great adventure. Upon his return that he swore he would never go on another trip with, or planned by yours truly.

Regrettably it had been many years since the four great friends had been together, so Paul and I decided to invite Jamie and Bob to come to Lake Opeongo in Algonquin. Paul and I had been maintaining our tripping skills by traveling to the park together for the past thirty years or so. It took us, along with our 'roughing it' photos and Jamie's gentle persuasion, nearly two years to convince 'Smoothie' that this was the thing to do. Tripping and camping had indeed changed over forty years and as 'old farts', it had taken on new meaning and a new dimension with a more relaxed atmosphere. Now there was more emphasis on camping and less on tripping as the years were beginning to catch up with us.



Paul Chamberlain, Jamie McAlpine, Bob 'Smoothie' Slingerland, and Peter Oyler ready to embark on their journey



A very organized campsite, indeed!

Bob finally relented and after much planning and rescheduling of timetables and family plans, we 'packed out' in Haliburton headed off to Lake Opeongo for five days in August of this year. To ensure good times as in the past, Paul was wearing the Chamberlain tam which has been on canoe trips since 1947 when his brother Clive first wore it at Glenokawa.

With Paul as master fire builder, Bob as sous chef, Jamie as dish washer extraordinaire, and me as chief cook, we had five days together to fine tune and rediscover all our tripping skills learned at camp, catch up with each other's lives, eat like kings, fish, paddle, rediscover the night skies, retell just slightly enhanced camp stories and enjoy the great wildlife that the park has to offer. This included a bull moose swimming nearby from the mainland to a nearby island and thirty-three adult common loons swimming past our campsite.

One of the common threads among the four of us was rediscovering, through Paul's great memory and his recent contacts for Kilcoo's 75th, the contacts that we made along the way. But most of all we remembered the friendships and close friends we all had made as a result of our years, however few or many, at Kilcoo. The great times shared over five days, our continued friendship over the years and our experiences at camp has led us to the conclusion that we'll be returning to the park next year. We have already set aside the dates. Hopefully, all being well, we will be able to continue this new tradition for the four of us well into the future.

PETER OYLER '60

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