

The Only Thing Lost Was One Cooking Pot

BY THURMAN IRELAND, CLYDE AND CRAIG PATTERSON

Everyone was miserable after five days of rain. Water splattered on my face through the single-wall tent. The downpour inundated our minds and permeated our souls making us homesick. Puddles seeped through the tent floor soaking my down bag and foam pad. My father's tent was several yards closer to the river's edge. He dreamed of drowning in his sleep, only to awaken to more wind

and rain. Hurricane Agnes was bearing down on Pennsylvania's Appalachian Mountains.

The year was 1972. I was a twelve-year-old Boy Scout in Troop 39 at Garfield Methodist Church in Pepper Pike, Ohio. Forty-two scouts and seven adults boarded a bus to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania for a 50-mile hike on the Appalachian Trail. Our scoutmaster and his wife graciously

hauled their tent-trailer to Crazy Horse Campground near Gettysburg to setup our base camp.

With the sun streaming through the trees, we began hiking at a trailhead near Boiling Springs. The deer, squirrels, chipmunks, and hawks watched our every move. As the pots and pans rattled up the Trail, we sang lyrics ranging from "The Other Day I Met a Bear" to "We All Live

Troop 39 looking forward to a 50-mile AT hike during Hurricane Agnes in 1972



in a Yellow Submarine". On top of a rocky overlook, blue skies afforded a magnificent view of Pennsylvania's farmland.

The next morning low-lying clouds sailed in from the southeast beginning an arduous week of rain. Our clothes quickly soaked through in the deluge. The Trail became a washboard of wet rocks and uneven footing. Rain dripped from our hats as we secured our ponchos around our backpacks.

We hiked 6 to 10 miles per day at different speeds resulting in an accordion of hikers that spread out and regrouped for lunch and dinner. Stone fireplaces served

as shelters to fight off hypothermia. Hatchets were used to split waterlogged wood for dry kindling. Our boots and socks were dried by the hot coals as we dodged the smoke during cooking and cleaning.

By the end of the week, the creeks were overflowing their banks and flash-flooding was rampant. We were camped at Raccoon Run shelter by a fast moving river. We dutifully cooked dinner, but felt disoriented from the constant exposure. Our feet and hands were wrinkled and pale and our postcards were smeared with wet ink.

The next morning, our abandoned tents were on an island cutoff by two rivers about six feet wide and waist deep. As our scoutmaster attempted to reach our gear, his legs were swept out from under him. Another adult grabbed his outstretched arm saving him from peril.

Our crew at base camp was rescued by the Red Cross and put up in a motel. The front page of the Gettysburg Times featured a picture of Troop 39's submerged tent trailer. The only thing lost during the whole ordeal was one cooking pot. Unfortunately, our scheduled tours of Gettysburg and Hershey's Chocolate

By the end of the week, the creeks were overflowing their banks and flash-flooding was rampant.

With no relief in sight, our scoutmaster met with the hosts of a Church Camp to bargain for emergency relief. Fortunately, barracks with bunk beds were available for our evacuation. The adults quickly woke us to get us out of harms way. Many of the younger scouts were crying from the cold hypothermic conditions.

We left our tents in the dark and formed a single file line in the driving rain. The older scouts directed us down a jeep trail to the Church Camp. Everyone helped each other wade through the floodwaters. At one point, I remember sinking to my waist in cold water before reaching higher ground. The camaraderie of the escape made food and dry beds that much more enjoyable as we reverted back to our intolerable behavior.

Factory were cancelled due to flooding.

The aftermath of Hurricane Agnes provided sobering statistics. Pennsylvania was declared a disaster area with 48 deaths and \$2.3 billion in damages. We had endured 18 inches of torrential rain on June 23 and 24, 1972. 210,000 people were forced to evacuate... including 42 scouts from Troop 39 at the Raccoon Run Shelter on the Appalachian Trail.

Postlude:—Craig Patterson of Melbourne, Kentucky wrote this article after finding a trip diary that his 84-year-old father Clyde wrote in 1972. Sadly, Troop 39 scoutmaster Thurman Ireland died on October 30, 2006 at age 83 after providing the title and trip details for this article.



To be considered, stories should be no more than 700 words and should be sent within the body of an email to journeys@appalachiantrail.org. If selected, your story may appear in either *A.T. Journeys* or on our Web site at www.appalachiantrail.org. Images should be accompanied by a caption identifying the location and all individuals within the photo. By submitting the image you agree that all individuals pictured consent to publication.