



Getting Excited about High Adventure

At Powder Horn Venturing and Boy Scout and leaders experience high adventure activities and learn to share those activities with young people.

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When Meghan Henning arrived at Camp Roy C. Manchester near Aurora, Ky., early one morning last September, she might have wondered if she was in the right camp—or even in the right century. Near the gate stood a group of buckskinned frontiersmen, decked out with powder horns and black-powder rifles.

“Well, this is an interesting bunch of people,” Henning thought. “Let’s see what’s going to happen here.”

She would soon find out.

Henning, a brand-new associate advisor with Venturing Crew 327, chartered to Holy Redeemer Catholic Church in Evansville, Ind., was at Camp Manchester to take Powder Horn, a high-adventure training course for Venturing and Boy Scout leaders. The frontiersmen (along with a number of frontierswomen) were the Powder Horn staff, Scouters whose mission was to get participants excited about high adventure. They were drawn from seven different Scout councils, although most represented the course’s two host councils: the Buffalo Trace Council, based in Evansville, and the Shawnee Trails Council, based in Owensboro, Ky.

Setting the tone

In an interview, course director Keith Gehlhausen explained the costumes. “It does set the tone right off the bat when you don’t see somebody standing there with a uniform on and rows full of knots but instead you’re seeing a guy in a tri-corn hat, breeches, and stockings,” he said. “That gets your attention and tells you that this is going to be something different.”

Different, indeed. The course’s first day included tomahawk throwing, black-powder shooting, a visit to a Revolutionary War-era encampment, and a campfire featuring folk-music duo Traveler’s Dream and professional storyteller Bob Valentine. The second day—devoted largely to water sports—began with wakeup music by the Beach Boys and ended with a laid-back beach party. Staff outfits that day included Hawaiian shirts, a pirate outfit, and Sea Scout dress whites.

Powder Horn is billed as a high adventure resource management course for leaders in Boy Scouting and Venturing, but one staff member more accurately described it as “summer camp for adults.” Over two very full weekends, the course’s 48 participants got to sail and kayak, climb and rappel, ice-skate and scuba-dive (in the same day!), and try geocaching and bird banding. They learned about cooking, fishing, ecology, and emergency preparedness. They took a float trip and camped out overnight. But most of all, they had fun.

“The staff’s having fun, the participants are having fun, and I think that’s the greatest arena to learn in,” said Chris Szybinsky, the Central Region’s Venturing president, who was on hand for part of the course.

Fun with a purpose

Like everything in Scouting, Powder Horn focuses on fun with a purpose. “[The participants] can get on the internet and find a lot of the information we’re providing,” Gehlhausen said. “What our staff is responsible for is providing enthusiasm and motivation for them to go back home and say, ‘This is something I really need to try with my Venturers’.”

That message appealed to Barry Goff, a long-time Boy Scout leader from Pikeville, Ky., who had started Venturing Crew 12, chartered to Pikeville’s First Presbyterian Church, in 2005. “I’m going to have to dig a little deeper and get out of my comfort zone,” Goff said as he reflected on the range of options available to Venturers.

One important lesson the Powder Horn course taught is that high adventure doesn’t have to cost hundreds of dollars or involve traveling hundreds of miles from home. To emphasize that lesson, the course’s second weekend began with a day of activities near downtown Evansville—at a climbing gym, a nature center, and a YMCA. “You don’t even have to get out of the city” to do high adventure, Gehlhausen explained.

Consultants play a key role

The course also demonstrated that adult leaders don't have to become experts in every activity. They just have to help their youth leaders find and recruit experts. Unlike most other BSA training programs, Powder Horn brings in outside consultants to teach nearly every session. Don Jacobson, author of *The One Pan Gourmet*, taught cooking. Staff members from the Blue Meridian Dive Shop in Owensboro and the Vertical Escape Climbing Center in Evansville offered their expertise. Sea Scouts from Ship 312, chartered to Nativity Catholic Church in Evansville, took participants sailing on Kentucky Lake and later helped facilitate Project COPE events at Old Ben Scout Reservation near Winslow, Ind., the home base for the course's second weekend.

"It's really good to have youth and adults on staff," said national Venturing president Maggie Belli, who served as a crew guide during the course. "You can have the adult perspective and the youth perspective, so [participants] can see both sides of everything. It works very well."

Since local resources are so important, every Powder Horn course is unique. The syllabus mandates that a course last six days—either a full week or two weekends—and that it cover all eight core requirements for the Ranger Award and 10 of the 18 electives. Beyond that, anything goes. A course in the Rocky Mountains might devote a lot of attention to the Mountaineering and Winter Sports electives, for example, while a Florida course would likely spend more time on Scuba, Watercraft, and Lifesaver.

Course casts a wide net

Because each course is unique—and because the program isn't up and running in every council yet—the Indiana/Kentucky course drew participants from as far away as Alabama, Maryland, and northern Illinois; they represented 12 councils in all.

Russell Fisher and Pat Knight, who serve as assistant Scoutmasters in Maryville, Tenn., traveled 300 miles one way each weekend to attend Powder Horn. Fisher said his troop—Troop 285, chartered to Blount Christian Church—has a very active high adventure program that includes annual Christmas break backpacking trips in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. "I'm just trying to find different ways to keep [my Scouts] interested," Fisher said.

If it did nothing else, the course offered a hint of Venturing's limitless possibilities. In their spare time at Camp Manchester, participants could browse a library of books, magazines, maps, and pamphlets on every conceivable high adventure topic. How big was the library? Big enough to cover more than 25 picnic tables on the dining hall's porch.

After the course, Henning said she'd learned so much that she "literally couldn't think on Monday because my brain was so full of everything."

It didn't take her long, however, to start sharing what she'd learned, not just with the member of Crew 327 but with adults who aren't involved in Venturing. Her

message: “You should check this out. It might not be for you, but it is for me. And it’s awesome.”

More Information about Powder Horn

Powder Horn is a high adventure resource management course designed to motivate and prepare adult Venturing leaders to support the Ranger Award. Boy Scout leaders who work with older Scouts are also welcome to participate. The six-day course is typically offered over two weekends.

Upon completion of the course, participants should:

- Understand the Ranger Award and other Venturing recognitions
- Know health and safety requirements and BSA rules and regulations that apply to high adventure activities
- Know what skills and certifications are necessary to lead various outdoor activities and how to obtain those certifications
- Be able to identify local resources and consultants for high adventure activities

To attend Powder Horn, you must be a registered adult member of the BSA, have completed basic training in either Boy Scouting or Venturing, be able to meet the physical requirements of the BSA Class III physical in a backcountry environment, and have your Scout executive’s approval.

For information on upcoming Powder Horn courses, contact your local council service center or visit <http://www.powderhorn-bsa.org>.