

Moon Valley Tattler Article – August 6, 2006

Venture Crew 323. What's that you think? Well, Venturing is a division of the well-known Boy Scouts of America specifically designed to keep older boys interested in scouting. Since this Venture Crew is a division of BSA troop 323, this Venture Crew is Venture Crew 323. But more commonly known as the Motley Crew (no, not the band; that's spelled differently) or the Motley Fools to its members. Now Venturing is very similar to scouting, except that while Boy Scouts focuses on advancement to Eagle Scout and doing daily good turns, Venturing is focused on the outdoors. We go out into the wild areas of our fair nation and explore places that most people honestly don't know even still exist. We spend days hiking through treacherous terrain eating nothing but the food out of our packs and using nothing but the gear on our backs. We've been to many places such as the Superstition Wilderness, the Mazatzal Wilderness, the Verde River, the Mogollon Rim, and the Gila Wilderness. Our most recent expedition went deep into, and out the other side of, the Gila Wilderness. We did an eight day, 63 mile hike. We went over mountains, up cliff faces, over ridgelines, and through canyons; and in doing this we saw some of the (probably) greatest scenery we will ever see. And we also got a chance to do a little bonding (aw, ain't that sweet). But no joke folks, one day we had to climb up an uber steep cliff face for, oh about a mile or so, but we got to see some amazing sites. We could see the mountains we had trekked over, the deep jungle-like canyon we had just climbed out of, and the surrounding terrain for miles and miles; we could even spy the city that we had passed through on our way to the Gila Wilderness (though we didn't figure out that it was a city till later that night when we could see the glow of the city

lights). At the top of that cliff where we camped that night was absolutely incredible, just remembering it invokes memories of the land of Rohan from Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings movies. And bush whacking our way through some of those canyons was an experience in its self. Getting slapped, scratched, whipped, sliced, diced, cut, bludgeoned, and bruised is a lot more fun then it sounds folks, trust me; but on to other things.

Recently, about last May or so, our fair Crew got featured, as in cover article, of the international Boy Scouting magazine Boy's Life! We were on the cover of an international magazine! I can't begin to impress upon you how much importance this had on us. Venture Crew 323, a bunch of regular teenage boys and a few dads, went down the ever treacherous, ever deadly, ever *wet* West Clear Creek canyon. This hike was rated second best (or hardest) in the state and eighth (I believe) in the nation. We had to swim, wade, climb, and boulder hop through this veritable death march. Some of the pools that we swam through were so dark and deep (and cold) that we couldn't even see the bottom. And we did all that with 25 to 40 pound packs on our backs. It was crazy. And we did it, in less time then most people usually require to do it, none the less. The Forest Service said that most people take about six or more days to complete that hike.

We had initially meant to complete the hike in four days so one of our members could get on a plane to Lithuania with his parents and teach the natives English. But due to some almost tragic, and sometimes humorous, mishaps; we ended up hiking through the fourth day, spending the last night in a ten by ten foot clearing, and waking up at four in the morning to hike up and out the canyon whilst being both baked and eaten alive by buzzing gnats. I kid you not, we're bloody loony. In fact, some might say that it's a

requirement to be crazy, almost foolish, to join Venture Crew 323, I know that the rest of the members and I are. But I digress.

Venturing is a great organization, you get to risk life and limb with your chums, explore wild and unknown places, and have adventures that will stay with you for the rest of your life. So far our Crew has (mostly) done hiking, but we've also attempted to go on a four-five day kayaking trip. But we got snowed out, no really, snowed out. You remember last year, during that really long dry spell and how it suddenly ended? Well, we had arrived late at night at the bank of the Verde River where we would be "setting sail". It was raining so we set up camp and went to sleep, but the next morning it went from raining to snowing. The one day the dry spell decided to stop was the day that we started to set out on our kayaking trip, talk about the jinx to end all jinxes. But we have some really cool trips planned for this coming year. We're going back to the Gila Wilderness to get the ten service hours that we need to earn to get the Boy Scout fifty miler award. We plan to do some more canyoneering, Wet Beaver Creek. We are also planning for a second go at the whole kayaking trip idea; we'll see how that works out. Last year we went to the Gila Wilderness. The year before that we went down West Clear Creek; this year for our super activity we are leaving the country. Yep, we're going to Copper Canyon in Mexico. And not the touristy ride in the train, do a one mile day hike then sleep in a hotel kind of trip; we're meeting up with a special guide who will integrate us with the local Mexican-Indian culture, yes, it's going to be friggin' sweet.

So Venture Crew 323 (the Motley Fools) is for teenagers between the ages of 14 and 21 and out of the eighth grade. And good news girls, if you like intense weeks full of

hiking, sleeping under the stars, carrying heavy packs, and exploring amazing new places, then Venture Crew 323 is the group for you! Venturing is a co-ed organization, which means both boys and girls can join up, the same age rules apply for members of both genders. So if you're interested, look for the ad somewhere in this paper put out by us (Venture Crew 323) that has the phone numbers of the Crew President, and the Crew treasurer. And if you're really interested, the current members of the Crew are John Russell (president), James Harris (vice president), Scott Eastman (Secretary), Corey Giesemann (Treasurer, how on earth I got this job I will *never* know), Max Wingert, Kevin Hawk, and Chris Hawk. As you can see, we are not a large organization; we operate on a very personal scale. But we have tons of fun doing what we do. To wrap this all up I'd like to end with a few quotes, one of them by a current crew member (written after our first major trip) and the others by Aldo Leopold and Herman Melville.

"I learned that there are wild places still, the earth isn't one big city (yet) and that exploring these places gives you a sense of satisfaction, of achievement, like you actually did something. ... You gain a lot of life experience from doing trips like this one, not the kind of experience that would help you get a job or a date, but the kind that changes who you are and your entire outlook on life, and really just makes you think."

-Venture Crew 323's first president

"No servant brought them meals: they got their meat out of the river, or went without. No traffic cop whistled them off the hidden rock in the next rapids. No friendly roof kept them dry when they misguessed whether or not to pitch their tent. No guide showed them which camping spots offered a nightlong breeze, and which a nightlong misery of

mosquitoes; which firewood made clean coals, and which only smoked... The elemental simplicities of wilderness travel were thrills not only because of their novelty, but because they represented complete freedom to make mistakes. The wilderness gave them their first taste of those rewards and penalties for wise and foolish acts which every woodsman faces daily, but against which civilization has built a thousand buffers. These boys were “on their own” in this particular sense.”

-Aldo Leopold

“As for small difficulties and worryings, prospects of sudden disaster, peril of life and limb; all these, and death itself, seemed to him only sly, good-natured hits, and jolly punches in the side bestowed by an unseen and unaccountable old joker... There is nothing like the perils of the wilderness to breed this free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy.”

-Herman Melville