

## **The Hike to Kia Kima in 1959**

Fifty years ago, my Dad, Tom McGuire, undertook something which had never been accomplished before or since. He decided our troop (Troop 66, sponsored by St. Michael's Catholic Church) was going to hike from Memphis to Kia Kima, before we started our week at camp. I had just turned 11 in February and joined the troop and I may have been a Second Class Scout by then, but I was still a Tenderfoot in all kinds of ways. We began by taking some "practice hikes", including one all the way out to the Penal Farm. When it came time for the real trek to begin, we started out on a rainy Sunday by hiking across the old Memphis-Arkansas Bridge. I think there were 11 of us Scouts, including my brother, Bob, who was 16 and the oldest Scout. Bob was also the lead cook for the trip. Besides my Dad, there were a number of other fathers who joined us for a couple of days at a time.

After we crossed the bridge, we divided into three groups. Two groups would hike and the other group was responsible for setting up and taking down camp, and preparing the meals, and then the next day we would rotate. Bob, with one or two of the fathers, would lead the morning hike and then Dad would swap with him at lunchtime so he could go buy whatever perishables were needed for the evening and next day's meals. Most of the fathers that accompanied us had spent time in the Army and would tell us the tales of the long marches they had been on. At least one of them later regretted the bragging when he came up with at first class set of blisters.

All of this was before most of the interstate, so we just walked along the edge of the highway. Marion, Gilmore, Truman, Jonesboro, Marked Tree, Hoxie, Imboden and many others were visited along the way. We'd often stopped at a little country store for refreshments and toilets. Everyone was friendly, but several questioned our sanity.

Dad and Bob had scouted out the route and tried to find suitable campsites along the way. I remember staying at a field next to a church in Marion on the first night and listening to the evening services. We also stayed on a couple of school grounds, at the edge of the sewer treatment plant in Jonesboro and once we were up in the hills, just in the woods along the road. They did try to find places, usually a school, where we could take a shower every couple of days and we were able to go to the community pools in Truman and Jonesboro for much needed relief after the days hike.

The longest hike I can remember was about 28 miles. Dad had planned on us having the longest days while we were in the Arkansas flat lands. By the time we were in the hills, the hikes were down to about 16 miles, but since we had gotten our "hiking legs" by then, we were finishing by lunch time. We'd then find something else to do in the afternoons, including going swimming in a creek near one of the campsites. A father gave us a practical lesson about jumping into water when you can't see what hazards await by splitting open his heel on a concealed rock and having to be taken back to Memphis for treatment. One of the campsites was near a portable sawmill that had been set up in the woods and we got to see them rough cut the trees into logs. Another was close to a berry patch so we treated ourselves to fresh berries with our breakfast. Whenever it was possible, we'd have a campfire at night, retell the stories of the day, and just enjoy being out in the open. We even made up a song about the hike that we shared with the other Scouts when we got to Kia Kima.

We used the old heavy green umbrella tents with the central pole. The mosquito screens on the front of the tents had snaps rather than zippers, and if you pulled the tent too tight when you were putting it up, the screen would gap between the snaps and the mosquitoes would come in for dinner! On our last night we camped across the river from camp at Upper Falls. It was marvelous camping in the cool shade after all the long hours in the hot sun along the road.

The tale of the hike didn't end there. As my Dad got older and retold the story, the hikes got longer, the hills got steeper, the weather got hotter and the mosquitoes got bigger. When he was in his 70's, some of his friends would make it a rite of passage for a new Scoutmaster to sit him next to Dad and casually say, "Tom, why don't you tell \_\_\_\_ about the time you hiked to Kia Kima?" and then the story would begin all over again.