

A New Generation

By Doug Smith

Photographs By Robb Hill

In partnership with a national organization and local outdoor sporting groups, Scout councils are hosting a Trailblazer Adventure Day, where many boys get their first chance at casting a fishing line or shooting at a target with an air rifle.

- [A Growing Partnership](#)

Seven-year-old Patrick Garrett lay belly-down on the ground, legs sprawled, BB gun gripped in his hands, squinting in deep concentration.

The Cub Scout from Pack 223 in South Milwaukee, Wis., peered down the barrel at the paper target in the distance, then cautiously squeezed the trigger.

A single BB spit out with a muffled "pop."

"Oh, I hit it!" Patrick said with glee after discovering that a couple of his shots found the target. "I'm good at it—and I never tried it before!"

Patrick was one of 500 Tiger Cubs, Cub Scouts, and Webelos Scouts from the Milwaukee area who, on a glorious autumn day, learned about wild turkeys, shot arrows, and cast fishing lines. They tickled their cheeks with a fur pelt, nuzzled hounds trained to hunt bear, and, of course, shot BB guns.



Nicholas Walloch takes aim on the archery range as his dad, Andy, awaits the result.

It was all part of Trailblazer Adventure Day, a program that introduces Scouts to traditional outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, and wildlife management. The program is a partnership between the BSA; U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation (USSAF), a national organization that promotes those activities; and state wildlife agencies.

Sampling traditions

The Trailblazer Adventure Program's goal is to introduce Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts to outdoor traditions "that have been around since America was established," explained Frank Price, the foundation's education director. "This is a hands-on event to give Scouts a taste of these activities."

Based on the broad smiles and shouts of delight, more than a few of the 500 Scouts attending the event at the scenic 290-acre Indian Mound Scout Reservation west of Milwaukee were already looking forward to the day when they could take part in the outdoor tradition.

Price noted that while not all the Scouts or the 200 parents and leaders who accompanied them will take up hunting or fishing, the event does provide them with a better understanding of hunting, fishing, and wildlife management.

"This event is a good fit for Scouting because we emphasize outdoor activities," said Dave Bates, BSA national camping and conservation director. "And kids tell us they want more outdoor activities."

The Scouts were divided into six groups, each taking turns at six activity stations, where community volunteers—hunters, anglers, and conservationists—shared their passion and knowledge.

Anglers in the making

First up for Tiger Cub Antonio Lopez and the other members of Pack 264 was fishing, one of the day's most popular activities and something many of the Scouts had never tried.

First, instructors gave the novice anglers casting lessons on dry land. When the Scouts tried it, the results were often hilarious, lines going every which way, crossing in a tangle. Soon, however, the Scouts were familiar enough with dry-land casting to launch baited hooks in-to the water of a nearby pond.

Antonio flipped his baited hook and bobber 25 yards out like a pro.

"That's because I know how to



Kenny Gray helps his son, Antonio, practice casting, a new experience for both.

fish," he said proudly as his dad, Kenny Gray, looked on.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for these kids," Gray said. "I don't remember anything like this when I was in Cub Scouts."

"They're having fun," said Tracy Panich as she watched her son, Turner, 7, of Pack 579, thread a worm on his hook and flip the line into the water.

Barb Jakopac, a volunteer with the Milwaukee Lake and Stream Fly Fishers, patiently untangled lines, baited hooks, and showed the Scouts how to cast. She could have been somewhere else fishing on her own. Instead, she volunteered to share her knowledge and passion for the outdoors.

"I hope this gives them an appreciation for our resources," she said. "If we don't preserve this

tradition, there'll be no fishing in our future."

Over at the archery station, a dozen members of the Wisconsin Bowhunters Association showed the Scouts how to shoot rubber-tipped arrows. The targets were plastic milk jugs hanging in front of a tarp, which caught errant shots. After getting basic safety and shooting instructions, the young archers let their arrows fly.

Alex Wegner, 7, of Pack 233 of South Milwaukee, drew his bow, aimed, and let an arrow fly. It struck a milk jug with a thwack. Alex grinned and notched another arrow.

"I think this is a great opportunity for kids to learn a lot of different things," said Alex's biggest fan, his mom, Sally.

Of turkeys and traps

At another area, Scouts were learning about wild turkeys. They discovered that the birds could run as

fast as 25 miles per hour, fly as fast as 55 m.p.h., and have vision sharp enough to spot the slightest movement 80 yards away. Those are some reasons why turkeys are challenging to hunt.

Shawn Dickey, a regional director of the National Wild Turkey Federation, explained that hunters were instrumental in helping to reintroduce wild turkeys to Wisconsin and in other parts of the nation. "There were 70,000 turkeys in the country in the 1930's; today there are an estimated 6.4 million."

Earlier, Dickey explained why he enjoyed volunteering for Trailblazer Adventure Day: "It's great to get kids out here and expose them to activities like hunting and fishing. The kids here to-day are our future."

Bob Gokey, a bear hunter from Nekoosa, Wis., echoed those comments. "If you don't get kids involved, you won't have a sport tomorrow," he said. Gokey and two fellow members of the Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association brought their bear-trailing hounds, hunting gear, stuffed bear heads, and a video to explain their sport to the Scouts.

And at the trapping area, 76-year-old Hank Sublisky of the Wisconsin Trappers Association showed Scouts the various traps he uses, what they are designed to catch, and why.

Trappers remove nuisance animals and help control wildlife populations, he explained.

At the conclusion of their presentation, Hank's wife, Crystal, offered each Scout a small scrap of fur as a souvenir. The Scouts eagerly snapped them up, stroking the fur and rubbing it against their cheeks.

"It's so soft," observed Matthew Verstegen, 8, of Pack 223.

Trying something new

Parents and pack leaders were delighted with the event.

"It's a good way to expose kids to hunting in a controlled atmosphere," said Ken Senner, who accompanied his son, Kenny Jr., of Pack 233. "I don't hunt, but I have no problem with people who do."

Steve Terranova, a hunter from South Milwaukee, said he was pleased that his son, Mario, 8, of Pack 233, felt the day's activities were "awesome." Introducing youngsters to hunting, fishing, and wildlife activities is important, Terranova said. "This gives them a chance to start a lifetime involvement in outdoor sports."

Pam Young brought 15 Cub Scouts from Pack 277 in central Milwaukee. "Getting to do archery and fishing and shoot BB guns is wonderful for the boys," she said. "They rarely get to fish or even get outside, except on the streets."

"What did you like best?" she asked her Cub Scouts as they waited in a line for their turn on the BB gun

range.

"Fishing!" many declared. "The furs!" others suggested.

"Most of these boys don't have a chance to do this stuff in the city," observed DeeDee Ahl, a den leader with Pack 223, who said the event provided a great experience.

Jeannette Janka of Pack 233, who attended with her 8-year-old son, James, agreed. "It's good for the boys to try something that they've never done before," she said.

Aiming at the future

Parents and leaders weren't the only ones happy with Trailblazer Adventure Day. Cub Scouts gave the day of excitement a thumbs-up.

"I learned what a wax worm is, and I learned that skunks are cool," observed Kameron Knapp, 8, of Pack 223. "I also learned that a fish can take the bait off your hook without getting caught. It happened to me three times!"

"My favorite thing was fishing," said Tyler Marquette, 7, also of Pack 223, who enjoyed the pure challenge of trying to reel in a big one. "I almost caught a fish," he confessed.

Organizers also were pleased with the reception by parents, volunteers, and Scouts.

"We limited participation to 500 youth, and we had to turn people away," said David Loosen, director of support service for the [Milwaukee County Council](#), as he handed out hot dogs and chips during a picnic lunch. "Based on the response, there's no question we'll be doing this again. We're very pleased."

"The future of the outdoors is with youth and their families," said U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation education director Frank Price. "To that end, the parents are the gatekeepers to the future."

Doug Smith is an outdoors writer for the Minneapolis Star Tribune.

A Growing Partnership



Launched in 2001, the **Trailblazer Adventure Program** was developed by the U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation (USSAF) in cooperation with the Boy Scouts of America, the Inter-national Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, state wildlife agencies, and the International Hunter Education Association. The program is being offered in more local Scout councils every year, with the number of participating Scouts growing from 1,500 the first year to 7,000 in 2002 and 30,000 in 2003, with an anticipated 50,000 participants in 2004 at 42 locations.

The program has two elements:

Trailblazer Adventure Day is a hands-on outdoor event. The U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation and volunteers from local outdoor sporting groups and government agencies team up to offer the program. Activities vary from council to council, but may include air rifle, trap shooting or .22 rifle target shooting, fishing, archery, trapping, boating orientation, wildlife identification, an obstacle course, hunting dog demonstrations, game calling, birds of prey demonstrations, and a live fish tank.

The day includes programs for both Boy Scout- and Cub Scout-age youth, based on BSA requirements regarding activities allowed for each age group. For example, Cub Scouts may only shoot air rifles, while Boy Scouts might shoot .22 rifles or shotguns.

"Most councils have aimed the day internally at their Scouts, but some have invited non-Scouts, with hopes of attracting them to Scouting, to showcase some of the things we're doing," said Dave Bates, BSA national camping and conservation director.

The Trail Master Program matches Scouts and their parents with mentors who will take them out to participate in an outdoor activity, such as a fishing trip or visit to a shooting range.

"The ultimate goal is to get them interested and involved in an activity, like hunting or fishing or target shooting," said Doug Jeanneret, U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance Foundation communications director.

"It's vital to bring new life to America's outdoor heritage, so these time-honored traditions and skills

don't disappear," added Frank Price, the foundation's education director. "They are part of our culture."

Youth in today's increasingly urban population have fewer opportunities to hunt and fish, especially when their parents do neither, Price noted. And surveys show that people who don't begin hunting and fishing as youngsters often don't take up the activities later in life.

Hunters, anglers, and trappers historically have paid for the nation's wildlife conservation efforts through license fees and taxes on equipment, and all Americans have benefited from those efforts, Price said.

For more information about the Trail-blazer Adventure Program, check with your local Scout council service center or visit www.trailblazeradventure.org.

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