

Captain's Skyline Trail

I created a new trail on the east side of the lake that I called Captain's Skyline Trail. You'll never find it. It doesn't go anywhere very interesting, unless you're traveling down the long road of my memory, and by now what little I cleared to make the trail is surely overgrown. Perhaps someday someone will get lost while going somewhere and stumble across it, not realizing it.

I created the trail as a faux shortcut. I wanted to scare the hell out of the Scouts.

That's one of our rights and privileges of being a paid staff member: license to do whatever you like, as long as it is mostly within the bounds of the laws of the state and regulations of camp, and at least within shouting distance of the limits of good taste. Dragging ten Scouts on an up-and-down, looping to and fro trail, over downed trees through the pitch black dark of a canopied forest floor is certainly legal although, to be honest, I should have had another adult with the group to fulfill the Boy Scouts of America's regulations for "two deep" leadership. I don't fancy 15-year old boys, so as long as no one else in the camp administration knew ~~anything about it~~ and no one got hurt, no fouls would be called.

Mention of this freedom

~~That~~ should be on the application form. It would be like one of those "We Want You" Uncle Sam military recruitment posters. Ostensibly it would recruit people to lead and teach Scouts at camp, teaching them skills that they would take with them into the real world and give them experiences that would have a positive impact on their lives. But somewhere in that poster, both for the sake of honesty and perhaps also as a recruiting tool, it would have to say "your word is law at camp." As long as you're not an idiot, it is. Want to make a bunch of adolescents sing for

I was one adult scout

their meals? Go for it. Condoned. Part of the program. Want to wake the campsites in your ^{vicinity} region up at 6am with a bugle? Sounds great. Play loud, play proud.

Want to make those same, previously loud and brash adolescents reduce their chatter to a nervous simmer because ^{unknown} camp ~~doesn't look like camp anymore~~ and ^{looks sinister in the dark?} do you know where we're going I don't like this? Ha ha, have we got the job for you!

(Keep in mind, however, that all is fair in camp and war. Scores are tallied. They even up eventually.)

That was the Captain's Skyline Trail. It's not much of a trail, no signs, no worn path. I'm the only one who can find it. I'm the only one that knows its name. Hell, it's not even a useful trail. But it was mine, and I spent a day or two, hacking and sawing, walking back and forth through the brush, setting it the way I liked. *I can be a real madman like that.*

It was an awful trail, not mindful of the topography as a good trail should be. That's because I stole most of the trail from the deer. You don't think Lewis and Clark made their way west without following the trails and rivers that the natives had settled, do you? Neither did I, but my natives had hooves and antlers, and were probably none too impressed that once a week that summer I intended to overrun their handiwork.

** This transition happens too fast — confusing*

If you work at the camp long enough ~~and~~ ~~also~~ prove to be of some legitimate service to the camp ~~and~~ you learn secrets about the camp. Some of the secrets you find via stumbling, some find

^{find}
you by word-of-mouth, and some are given to you like gold coins placed firmly in your hand.

Ranger Kevin introduced me to a trail to the lake that I had never seen before. 2001 was my fifth year at camp, and I had been around the circumference of the camp several times, through the middle ^{hundreds of} ~~multiple~~ times more, and ^{so close to camp proper} just the idea that there was a hidden trail ~~to the lake~~ was shocking. In fact, there were two. And there was a hidden field. How? Why wasn't I notified before? It wouldn't have mattered. I probably wouldn't have listened.

It was shocking to learn about new territories and trails ~~in a pleasant way~~ because camp has ~~a way of shrinking~~ ^{shrinks} every time ~~you~~ ^I return, and to find that camp has the power to renew itself -- that's comforting. That means that it may be possible that the camp I see will never shrink to a size smaller than the camp I remember. There ^{will} always ^{be} something more to want. I'm afraid of the day that the real camp becomes so much smaller than the memory camp that the memory camp collapses under the strain of supporting the illusion. That's how my hometown is. That's how my old schools are. They're not the same. ~~They're not the same.~~ Someone, while I was away, swooped in and replaced them all with smaller scale models. The expansive forests that used to separate one lot from another have been pared down to a ^{thin} line of trees. Castles became buildings. The haughty and happy neighbors were given gray hair. The streets shrank. And on. And on.

Dear world: have you no constancy? Can't you give a guy a break and let things just stay as I remember them?

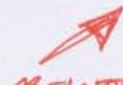
^{reach}
The hidden trail leads from a ~~finger~~ of the Horseshoe Bend field that I had not explored. I had

been through the Horseshoe Bend field so many times that I felt it was already explored, though I had only once or twice strayed from the trail. I tend to miss the sites in the sights I see the most. You get used to what you've seen and stop looking.

Kevin, that ornery bastard, is the type of guy who could hide something like that under your nose, just at the horizon so that you could have found it yourself if you were willing. Kevin maintained a trail to the lake, a steep little shamble, in the event that someone might find it useful. Really. That's it. There was a trail there, so occasionally he kept it mowed. One day he showed it to me and asked if I could use it. The guy is like a father, just as ornery, ~~and~~ ~~percolating~~ with ideas that brim from his bearded mischievous boy grin. When he offers a secret, a glimpse into a world you didn't know existed, you take him up on the offer. He's not just offering a look at a trail. He's offering trust.

The trail started on the west edge of the Horseshoe Bend field, in a stuck out thumb of tall grass that I had never ventured into. Even if I had, the trail was indistinguishable from the rest of the treeline. It was a green tunnel, the vegetation thick at the opening, a mix of stomach-high grass and forest floor weeds that grew healthy in the open sunlight. Tree branches sloughed lazily over the trail opening like a gate ~~that~~ ^{ing} camouflaged the opening beyond. But once you broke through the first several ^{steps} ~~meters~~, the direct rays of sunlight were poached by the maple canopy and the trail was wide enough to accommodate the ^{ATV} ~~gator~~.

~~I don't know~~. Does this mean that you need to know where to set your bearings before venturing off on a trail that you want to exist? Does this mean you need to bust through that week barrier


re-work these 2 ?'s

and discover the worlds beyond? Perhaps it just means that you need to keep your eyes and ears open, and the hidden trails will be opened to you. Maybe there is no meaning. It could have just been a trail.

Go down, down, down the green tunnel, past the cedars that maintain a community among the seasonal trees. Down, ~~and~~ the sun is a green memory. ~~And~~ the trail underneath is grass, not underforest bristles and weeds. See, the trees are young on this slope. Few of them remember the land before ~~the~~ dam and the ~~birth~~ arrival of Lake Roberts, thirty-some years before.

For us, the seasonal staff, it's the same old lake that we've always had, nice and fresh when the ~~rain~~ ~~is~~ ~~keeping~~ ~~the~~ ~~algae~~ ~~from~~ ~~setting~~ ~~up~~ ~~a~~ ~~permanent~~ ~~home~~. There are fish, and there are weeds.

We have to take the boats from the boathouse, set up the docks and lakefront, sprint through six weeks of splashing kids, clean the boats, and place them back in the boathouse. The lake exists for seven or eight weeks a year, and ~~it's natural to think~~ ~~that~~ it has always been written like that.

Camp is always changing if you're willing to admit it. There's always a thread that runs from one year to the next, maintaining contact between the different experiences. But it's hard to admit it, ~~it~~ ~~change~~ even if you recognize it. Admitting that camp changes is admitting that we change.

So what was it like for the camp staff that came before the lake? Did they come back and say, "Hey, that's a nice lake!" Were there some that felt the presence of an intruder ~~in that lake~~ ~~,~~ ~~submerging~~ ~~their~~ ~~memories~~ ~~of~~ ~~a~~ ~~place~~ ~~that~~ ~~existed~~ ~~only~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~past~~ ~~now~~, ~~underwater~~? That's before my time. For me, the lake is, always was, always will be. Lake Roberts is always seen from the dam, ~~the far side~~ ~~the~~ ~~marsh~~ ~~straight~~ ~~away~~ ~~and~~ ~~far~~ ~~back~~, ~~undisturbed~~ by the flailing

paddles of the novice canoeists. The right, east side, near to the dam is disturbed only by the fishermen wanting a little peace, but beyond the first indented gully, no one bothers except for the trees that could bear the loneliness no more and keeled into the lake. You really believe that it can't change because you haven't seen it change. *Memory asimetia.*

However, the lake can stay the same and change. *It requires* ~~I merely had to~~ *in* change ~~my~~ perspective. Have you ever been canoeing in the dark? It's a brand new lake in the dark. On Lake Roberts, in the dark, *there is no city* ~~sky glow~~ *It is* is diminished by rural isolation and all direct light is hidden by the surrounding bowl of trees that have waited until after dark to reach for new heights. The darkness and lack of human noise are obscene -- where are the runaround Scouts that make camp their playground? Here the Milky Way blazes overhead and the sound of frogs and crickets blares from all sides.

Every group that I took to the lake for a late night cruise was awed. There you are. The bank of the lake is not something you can see, you can only sense it; ~~at~~ ^{it} at the level of the water the bank does not exist, but the trees overhanging the bank are a darker color than the sky behind. The usual rambunctiousness of the day is replaced with welcome quiet. What causes the quiet? ~~On~~ *The Scouts in my charge* ~~one hand, they know~~, perhaps, that they've been given a secret, even though it is a small one.

There's no way anyone should be on the lake at night; they knew it, I knew it. ~~I suspect~~ ^(P) the quiet is also due to a apprehension. You don't need to say out loud, "Don't fall into the water." At night the water is blacker than the shade of the trees, which is blacker than the sky, which is ~~the~~ *the darkest black in our palette.* ~~mysterious black we've all used as a baseline.~~ *previously was* What in the hell could be in the water that's blacker than the night? ~~Or, in terms better understood,~~ [≡] how in the hell do you save yourself after the plunge?