



Shoal River Canoe Trail

By Dusty Henning

Friday, May 5 we got to the Scout Hut at about 6 p.m., packed up quickly and arrived about 8 p.m. at Camp Euchee. Early Saturday morning we loaded the canoes on a trailer and pulled them to the Shoal River Canoe Trail. We were only 100 yards from the river when Mr. Kimmel's car broke down. My dad stayed to help him and the rest of us pushed on towards the river.

The Shoal River Canoe Trail is officially designated as part of Florida's Statewide System of Greenways and Trails. Twisting and turning through a remote part of the western Panhandle, the Shoal River trail covers 27 miles but we only canoed about 12 miles. The current on the river is usually around 2-3 miles per hour. Halfway down the river we stopped for a lunch break of ham wraps.

We felt miles away from civilization as we paddled through forests thick with maple, oak, gum, and cypress trees. Besides all the trees (which I kept running into) we saw lots of spiders and, to my surprise – trash. Along the trail, creeks broadened into small lily-covered pools that we were told provide excellent fishing. During the day we took about three water-play breaks near some sandbars along the bends of the river. This narrow river is usually 3-4 feet deep and they say the water level doesn't usually go up or down more than three feet.

Saturday night we cooked amazing Coca Cola Chicken in a Dutch oven and cranked out delicious homemade ice cream. Sunday morning we used our Dutch oven to make sweet rolls for breakfast. After breakfast we packed up and headed back to the Scout Hut.

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"I can think of no greater event to promote the standards and ideals of the Boy Scouts of America than to welcome this true American hero into the ranks of Eagle Scouts, Cottone said.

Only a few people in cases similar to Paige's have received their Eagle Scout badges so many years after they earned them, said John Reesor, the top Boy Scout official in Jacksonville. "It is extremely rare." Although more than 1 million Boy Scouts have earned the Eagle Scout rank since 1911, only about 4 percent of all Boy Scouts do so. To earn the award, a scout must fulfill requirements in the areas of leadership, service and outdoor skills by earning merit badges and planning and completing a significant public service project.

Among the well known Eagle Scouts are former President Gerald Ford, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, former House Speaker Thomas Foley, Olympian Willie Banks, astronaut James Lovell and former presidential candidate Ross Perot.

Paige finally received his Eagle Scout award in Jacksonville, FL on March 24, 2003. "I never cease to be amazed at the wonderful things that happen to me," he said. "The older I get the more things happen." Mitchell Paige passed away eight months later at the age of 85 on November 13, 2003. He was the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient of the Guadalcanal Campaign. He is buried at Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, California. On May 2, 2006, the Board of Education of Desert Sands Unified School District in a unanimous decision decided to honor Col. Paige, when naming its newest school. Col. Mitchell Paige Middle School will open in the fall of 2006 in La Quinta, California.

Story Sources: Pensacola New Journal, Associated Press, Ron Word, 3/24/2003 (Cheryl Jones); The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2/19/03, A.J. Caliendo: http://www.post-gazette.com/neigh_south/20030219smonhero0219p7.asp; and Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitchell_Paige, Scouting Magazine, October 2003.

