

A Brief History of the Land We Know as Cricket Holler

By Rob Hook, in partial completion of his Wood Badge ticket, August 2002.

Introduction

Cricket Holler is located in Butler Township, Montgomery County, Ohio. It is bordered by Frederick Pike to the south, Peters Pike to the west, Brantford Pike to the east, and private residences to the north. It is legally described as located in Township 3, Range 5, Section 32.

Cricket Holler is the first scout camp to be owned by the Miami Valley Council. Before Cricket Holler, scouts canoed and hiked up the Stillwater River to another property nearby (dubbed “Camp Pershing” after the famous World War I general) on a loan basis. But finally beginning in 1919, the council was able to acquire a camp to call its own, bit by bit. It took some years to assemble it into the 160-acre parcel we know today.

1800-1918

As determined from historical documents and atlases of Montgomery County, Butler Township was settled sometime around 1800. Daniel and Stephen Jones of North Carolina settled in Township 3, Range 5, Section 32 around 1806, and may have been the first permanent European inhabitants in the area of Cricket Holler.

By the time of the first published atlas of the county (1851), the ownership of Section 32 was shared by William Gregg, D. Hilston Gregg, L. Johnson, Will Johnson, and J. Inskip. At least two cabins are recorded on that atlas on the Cricket Holler portion of Section 32: one along Peters Pike and the other near the center of the property. Comparing the atlases published in 1851, 1869, 1875, 1895, and 1920, a series of land swaps and purchases occur over the period between 1851 and 1918. Over this period of buying and selling, some of the parcels have been subdivided, and the present shape of Cricket Holler begins to be visible in the property lines.

1920 to the present

The history and development of the camp was outlined from *Fun and Service, a 60 history of Boy Scouts of America in the Miami Valley Council* (Hauff, 1970) and several newspaper articles that relate to Cricket Holler (see the References).

The 35-acre “Camp Pershing” along the east bank of the Stillwater River was used during mid to late 1910s by the scouts, and it was generally good, but it was being used only on a loan basis. That arrangement limited the number of improvements that could be done to the property to make it more usable for resident camp.

In a Dayton Daily News article published in the early 1940s, the following history of the camp is quoted from a letter by Robert D. Dalrymple, a professional scouter in the council during the 1930s:

“As to the history of the camp. The first Boy Scout camp for Dayton was located just across the road from the old lodge on the Peters pike. A small frame cabin stood about where the little cottage was at that time. I do not know when this site was first made available, but it was used for both weekend and summer camping until about 1916 or 1917. Then, through the help of Robert Patterson and several men on the executive board, the original camp of 11 acres was established

on the site where we formerly had the big lodge near the road and the log cabin back in the woods.”

A newspaper article from April 1919 announcing the purchase describes the property as “...a tract comprising 11 acres of big, wild forest, with a creek running through the property providing a regular, old-time swimming hole. There is, too, a great hill for caves and dugouts, and it is proposed to utilize every inch of ground on this tract for developing the principles of the scout work.” The site is described as five miles from Dayton, and within a 5-cent carfare. Most of this parcel, except a small area along Peters Pike, is still part of the camp today. It contains some of the oldest woodland in the camp and, perhaps symbolically, this part of the camp includes the current chapel.

The “big lodge” mentioned by Mr. Dalrymple was built around 1919 by volunteer labor. A dam was also installed along the small stream that parallels Peters Pike to create a swimming hole. A stone and mortar dam, possibly the one built at this time, remains along the stream, although it has been breeched and no longer holds water. By the end of 1921, the “log cabin back in the woods” was erected by the Optimist Club. Remnants of a chimney that may have been in that log cabin are still present in West Camp.

The April 1919 news article mentions, “A winter camp is contemplated for the holiday vacation, the second such camp of its kind in the country, the first having been conducted by the New York Boy Scouts.” As we know, these winter outings later became known as “Klondike Derbies,” and the first one in the Miami Valley was held at Cricket Holler in 1922.

The camp’s name came from a contest held in 1921. The camp newspaper of the previous year had been named *The Cricket*. It was Milt Caniff, who was a scout at the time and later became a nationally known cartoonist of “Steve Canyon” fame, who submitted the name Cricket Holler. Kit Cricket, the character we often see around the Miami Valley Council and who is posted on the gate at Woodland Trails, is Milt’s creation, and he created a rather elaborate story about Kit’s defense of Cricket Holler from the malevolent “hodags.” You can read the story in *Fun and Service*.

Mr. Dalrymple’s letter goes on to describe further history of the camp:

“... we used (the original 11 acres) for both weekend and summer camping until about 1925. In 1926 we secured, through rental, 55 acres directly south of the 11 acre woods on which we set up our first division type camp. The divisions we had at that time were wood-craft, pioneer camp, Indian village and seamanship division. This new ground took in the territory made famous by the Buckeye camp murder story. In 1927, Fred Patterson of the NCR made available, through a gift, a large sum of money for the purchase of about 100 acres of ground upon which the camp is now situated. We operated camp in 1929-30-31 on the new site. Then, due to the lack of money and not having permanent improvement on the grounds, we had to abandon the scout camp entirely.”

According to a newspaper article in July 1942, for the next 11 years (until 1942), Dayton scouts went to Camp Pike in Pike County for camp, and Cricket Holler was left unused. However, due to the depression and WWII (during which time gasoline was rationed and rubber for tires was carefully conserved to support the war effort), there was interest in reestablishing a local camp program again. Council Executive “Mac” Privette led the redevelopment of the camp. The council had previously sold some 39 acres of the tract that had been accumulated, and funds left from the sale were used to build an administration building, housing, living quarters for a caretaker, and a warehouse. Local businesses included Requarth Lumber, Frigidaire, Hobart, and NCR, donated much toward the materials, and a lot of the labor was volunteer. Shawnee Camp was the first to be completed in July 1942. Shacks were erected at the campsites, made from lumber that was salvaged from the former office of the Brinkman Engineering Company that had burned. The lumber was blackened by charcoal, and scouts and scouters reconditioned the wood by hand to make it “good as new.” An August 25, 1942 article cites the placement of a time capsule at the site of the old council ring, protruding two inches above the ground, which contained a story of the development of the camp and which was to be recovered ten years later. (It is uncertain whether it was ever recovered.)

The swimming pool was completed in 1944, also built largely from donated materials and labor. The steel reinforcing for the concrete is old iron bed springs donated by the Salvation Army. The Kiwanis (or “K”) lodge was completed in 1945 thanks to funds raised by the Kiwanis Club. Requarth Lumber donated most of the materials. In 1946, individual districts constructed the Adirondack shelters at each of the campsites we know today. The forest was “rebuilt” through the planting of trees contributed by the US Forest Service and planted by scouts in the 1940s and 1950s.

By the late 1950s, the enrollment in the Miami Valley Council had outgrown Cricket Holler. The larger Woodland Trails was acquired became the primary camping facility for the council. There was an effort at this time to convert Cricket Holler to a leader training center. Frank Tait, a local businessman, sponsored the drive with a seed donation of \$75,000. The “Frank Tait Training Center” title resulted. Cricket’s current primary use is as a leader training center for both scouts and scouters.

Much of the structure of the camp as we know it today stayed much the same through the next decades, although certainly there were some additional structures and upgrades to the facilities during this time.

In 1998, like 1931, the needs of the camp versus the financial resources of the council came close to a permanent loss of the camp. To rectify a budget shortfall, the camp was being considered for sale to a private developer for housing or to the local Five Rivers Metroparks to be maintained as a public open space. This situation caused a heated debate throughout the council for almost two years. Given its location in Montgomery County, the land sale would have been worth millions of dollars to the council. It was that immediate financial benefit that was weighed against the historical significance of the property to the council, as well as its ideal location for continued use as a training facility. Fund raisers, donations, and a decision to sell a portion of Woodland Trails to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to make up financial shortfalls finally combined in a decision in late 1999 to keep the camp under the control of the Miami Valley Council.

Notable people involved in scouting have visited Cricket Holler. There are some casual rumors circulating that Lord Baden-Powell visited the camp. In *Fun and Service*, there is mention only of a letter sent to the council by Baden-Powell, but no visits. It is plausible conjecture that Dan Beard, being from Cincinnati, visited the camp at some point in time. William “Green Bar Bill” Hilcourt, naturalist, World Scouter and author of the ninth edition of the Boy Scout Manual, visited the camp around 1979 or 1980. He left an inscription on a post in the K-lodge, stating, “The Patrol method is the *only* method.”

All of the notable businessmen cited above that made the camp available to scouts certainly visited, and it is possible that many of their sons camped there. Orville Wright started the first “air scouts,” and it isn’t too much of a stretch to think that he also visited Cricket. From the July 1942 newspaper article cited above comes this interesting historical anecdote: “It was about this time (1929-1931) that Lt. Jimmy Doolittle, after making the first ‘outside loop’ in history, joined up as a scout master of a Dayton troop, spending part of his vacations at Cricket Holler.” This is indeed the same Jimmy Doolittle who planned and executed the bombing raid on Japan in April 1942 using B-25 bombers launched from the deck of the USS Hornet. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, and eventually became a Brigadier General. The lesson is, never take your Scoutmasters for granted!

Certainly, many current leaders of Dayton and other communities have camped at Cricket, and leaders of the future are camping there still.

Conclusion

This is a brief account of the history of this camp, and I have only referenced a few of the pertinent documents. What we can draw from this short history is that Cricket Holler is a typical example of most Boy Scout (and other youth) camps, even those as large as Philmont. They were acquired and built and maintained on the backs of volunteers and donors. As such, they carry with them throughout their histories the memories, hard-earned personal fortunes, and the labors of love of many dedicated to the cause of scouting and the youth of America. Let us try to remember that, and let it help us to continue on their trail.

On a final note, the council ring was completed and dedicated in 1946. John Yeck, a former professional scouter, wrote the dedication of the council ring. Although written for a specific date, what it says still pertains to this camp, the heart of the Miami Valley Council. It is copied here as published in *Fun and Service*.

Abide by the Law, aspire to the Oath. See ya' down the trail.

DEDICATION OF THE KLEON THAW BROWN COUNCIL RING

Written by John Yeck

Cricket Holler

September 21, 1946

COUNCIL RING – THE HEART OF SCOUTING

In 1795, Mad Anthony Wayne pressed westward. The new republic was growing, stretching its frontiers, battering its way.

Near Greenville, in Ohio, he smoked, with Little Turtle, the pipe of peace.

Last summer, Valley Boy Scouts raced the flame of peace from Greenville and perpetually enshrined it in this growing council ring.

They tend it, guard it, night and day. It burns before you now.

What is this flame? Is it but light, combustion, fire? No.

This flame is from the hearts of men. It is kindness, care, and courtesy. It is Scouting's Oath and Law. It is the brotherhood of man.

It is the focal point of the council... the treasure of the camp...the memory of every boy.

The flame is the heart of the council ring.

And now we meet to dedicate a spot... a memorial. We call it a council ring. Is it but a pile of stone, a mass of mortar? No.

It is pageantry and tranquility...blazing fire and dying ember...clarion call and cautious whisper.

It is priceless ease to tired muscles and well earned rest for weary bones.

It is the long, long thoughts of youth. It is where the best of a boy brings the rest of the boy...a spot where hearts are strong, and clean, and clear...where souls are molded and men are made...where a boy is one with nature, and very close to God.

This is the heart of a camp.

What is a camp? Is it just dirt and fields and trees? No.

It's the incubator of the world. It's the spring of life. It's a place of growth. It's a human farm, where the harvest is vital... priceless...irreplaceable.

Boys, who would be Men.

A camp is the heart of a world of hope.

What makes a world of hope? Is it giant, tremendous, measuring eight thousand miles from pole to pole? No.

It is tiny, unmeasurable. It is but a soul-like spark in the heart of a man. It is a striving for friendliness, brotherhood, understanding.

The hope of the world is in peace and peace is in the hearts of men.

So, today, on the twenty-first day of September, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and forty-six, the way we reckon time, we gather to dedicate a spot...in a camp...in a world.

But what is dedication?

Is it the end...the goal? No.

It is rather the beginning, like a high school commencement. Not the goal, but the starting line. It is a pause, a look at the tools, before they are put to work. It is a challenge, a charge, a plea, for more tools and more work.

It is a challenge which comes in the night.

In a world of hope...

in a camp of growth...

at a spot of reverence...

in a flame of peace.

HERE IS THE HEART.

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