

Have you heard of Camp Henry Outdoor School? CHOS is one of the newest and greatest ways for our youth to get first hand knowledge and experience living and appreciating the immense beauty of God's natural world. These adventures start in the back yard of the very special Lake Logan Episcopal Center, and where the ability of wilderness travel and living is readily accessible in the adjacent Shining Rock Wilderness. This summer over 30 campers hiked, scrambled, waded, laughed, and prayed through some of the most beautiful mountains that this Episcopalian has ever visited.

We are very blessed to live in such a wonderful area and even more blessed to be able to walk through areas which God surely must have spent a little extra time on. This summer middle and high school age campers, as well as an awesome confirmation group from Hickory, enjoyed learning about back country travel and living using top-of-the-line gear provided by Mast General Store. We put that knowledge to the test, braving the summer heat and storms for which these old mountains are known. Alpine Tower climbing, rafting on the Nantahala River, and generally a great time rounded out an experience that was not only fun, but also spiritually uplifting for campers and instructors alike.

I can speak for instructor Isabel Carson and chaplain Will Bryant in saying that teaching is the best way to learn, and I am sure that Father Alan Akridge of Hickory would give a big high-five to that as well. I know that as a young (ok maybe not as young as I like to think) member of the church struggles from time to time with my feelings of faith, religion, and church. Yet in times like these I turn to the wilderness for spiritual growth, a fact that Jesus, John, Moses, and many other of our great teachers used as well. I find that after a week spent in the woods with such bright and amazing young people that I am spiritually refreshed. And I get the feeling that the youth who have experience CHOS trips would concur.

CHOS is a small program, but has the potential to grow and continue to be great. The facilities, location, instructors, chaplains, and especially the participants give this program infinite potential. Perhaps one of the most influential moments that I have had in my many years as a wilderness student, guide, or traveler was with the Junior High group of campers. After five days of practicing and implementing our back country skills, we found ourselves on a wide rock face atop Cold Mountain, gazing across the near twenty miles of the Art Loeb trail which we had trekked in the previous days. Everyone sat silently, a collective choice made without provocation, at this moment I realized that the Spirit truly does move in all things, old as the Appalachian Mountains, and new as a 12 year old Episcopalian.

I can tell you that the many nights spent in sleeping bags and tarps under the stars have the potential to foster some of the greatest experiences that one could have. We hope that CHOS continues to grow (trips for priests, or "big kids"?). This is a great program that I would suggest that anyone, and everyone, look into. I hope this is a great year, full of blessings for you and yours, and we hope to see you next summer hiking to shining rock, or swimming in flat laurel creek, smiling and laughing with God and your neighbor on one of the very special CHOS trips to come.

Yours in Christ,

Ian Williams