



*The Most  
Adventure  
a Scout  
Can Have*

# MONTANA HIGH ADVENTURE BASE CAMP

The rain was steady and found its way into unwanted places. Alongside three Boy Scouts, three trek assistants, and one dad, I stood in the rain to learn how to roll up my packraft and attach it to my backpack. The next day, I would strap that pack to the bow of a bathtub-size boat and white-knuckle my way down the South Fork of the Sun River on the edge of Montana’s Bob Marshall Wilderness. But first, our group struck out into the sage, mud, and cow pies for a short “shakedown hike” at the Boone and Crockett Club’s Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Ranch. The hike aimed to see how strong and prepared the group was for six days in the wilderness.

A wall of mountains known as the Rocky Mountain Front, also known as the “backbone of the world” to members of the Blackfeet tribe, rose to our west. The rain brought fog, which rolled in and out providing temporary views of the Front. We returned to headquarters four hours and two miles later, sufficiently water-logged and smelling like the terrain we had just explored. The program was living up to its unofficial motto: accept the wet.



Scouts head out for the shakedown hike.



**PJ DELHOMME**

CRAZY CANYON MEDIA  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF  
PJ DELHOMME AND  
GENE BUDSOCK

**In partnership with Boy Scouts of America, Montana Council, the Boone and Crockett Club hosts an intense immersion into the wildest landscape in the Lower 48.**

**LEFT: With packs strapped to the bow of their packrafts, Scouts head into the "Bob."  
BELOW: Before embarking, Scouts perform one last gear check.**

After a hot lunch and a change of clothes, the Scouts looked over maps to plan a week's worth of adventure. Because these Scouts were from different troops across the country, this group was working together for the first time. While many Scouts arrive with their established troop, others arrive solo. Together, these Scouts make up a provisional group. As the group planned the next six days, they considered each participant's physical fitness and skill level based on the shakedown hike.

Gene Budsock is an Eagle Scout from Clinton, New Jersey, and a member of our group. During the route-finding process, he lobbied for summiting a peak and seeing as much of the "Bob" as possible. He tempered those ambitions because he was part of our provisional team, which wasn't as strong or ambitious as he had hoped. "It's all about being part of a group," he said. My assignment was to tag along with the group and get just a taste of packrafting with the Montana High Adventure Base Camp (MOHAB).

The next day dawned

cool, sunny, and perfect. On the drive to the trailhead, we stopped at a reservoir to get to know our boats (and accept a lot more of the wet). The wind was screaming down the walls of the Front and blowing straight across the reservoir. We pumped up our boats and launched, fully clothed, into white caps.

"Okay, who's going in first?" said Maddie, an experienced whitewater rafter and one of the trek assistants. One by one, we bailed overboard into the frigid lake and tried getting back into our boats. My boat caught the wind when I bailed, and it skipped eagerly toward North Dakota. Maddie paddled furiously to grab my boat as I swam toward shore.

After some laughs and lessons learned, it was time for the real deal. We strapped on our gear at the put-in, a small side channel to the South Fork of the Sun River. The trip quickly became real when we entered the main channel and met the historically-high spring runoff.



### A CAMP LIKE NO OTHER

The Montana High-Adventure Base Camp (MOHAB) is unlike any other Scouts program because it's the only nationally accredited high-adventure Boy Scouts of America (BSA) program that offers backcountry packrafting experiences. Scouts who experience MOHAB combine the swift and thrilling challenge of packrafting with backpacking and camping in one of the most remote and wildest places in the Lower 48.

The Bob Marshall Wilderness is more than a million acres of rugged grizzly country, which looks and feels much like it has for eons. While some Scouts who attend MOHAB have never backpacked before, the trek assistants highly recommend that participants have some previous experience. In addition, Scouts must be at least 14 years old, be in shape, and provide a copy of a medical evaluation and BSA Swimmer classification within one year of their MOHAB start date. All of these requirements and more can be found at [www.montanabsa.org/high-adventure/](http://www.montanabsa.org/high-adventure/).

## B&C'S CONNECTION TO SCOUTS BSA

Theodore Roosevelt, a founder of the Boone and Crockett Club, was a staunch supporter of the Boy Scouts of America when they were founded in 1910. In 1912, President Roosevelt heartily accepted the post of Chief Scout Citizen, and he held that honorary title until his death. Today, the Club continues to participate with BSA, providing wilderness and “bear aware” training to leaders and offering Scouts the opportunity to experience the wildest and most remote places in the lower 48 through its MOHAB program. “As our founder did, we continue to believe in getting our young people into the outdoors by providing a challenging and exciting experience that will build personal character as well as respect for our wildlife and wild places,” said Tony A. Schoonen, Chief Executive Officer of the Boone and Crockett Club. “Scouts grow to become leaders. This experience helps give them grit and determination while also realizing the importance of conserving our nation’s wildlife and natural resources.”

Since 2006, the Boone and Crockett Club has worked in partnership with the Boy Scouts of America, Montana Council to provide the ultimate backcountry wilderness experience. The packrafting option was added to the curriculum in 2013. “From the moment technology is left behind, participants surrender to the wilderness,” said Jory Dellinger, Scout Executive and CEO of the Boy Scouts of America, Montana Council. “They have to dig deep in trusting each other and in themselves. There’s no better way to hone the Scouting principles. Each young man or woman who attends MOHAB betters themselves along the trail. And that’s what Scouting is—becoming the best of ourselves.”

## GOING WITH THE FLOW

In 15-second intervals, we launched our boats into the full force of the river. It was running at 80 percent of maximum flow. In other words, it was big for the South Fork. If paddling the reservoir was a Sunday drive, this was the Daytona 500. At half the speed of sound, we lurched and bounced over submerged rocks, taking face shots of cold water. Hoots and hollers echoed over the sound of the rapids. I learned the hard way not to slide off the boat’s butt pad. Otherwise, a thin piece of plastic was the only thing between an unforgiving rock and my bottom half.

Up ahead, Gene had already flipped out of his boat and took Carter, a first-year assistant, with him. Someone recovered Gene’s boat, but Carter’s continued downstream. Unless stuck in a downed tree or an eddy, Carter’s boat and gear would be waiting for him in a few days, and a dozen miles downstream at the take out at Gibson Reservoir.

For those of us who still had boats, we bailed them out at every stop. If not, the extra water weight made steering difficult, not to mention colder than it needed to be. If we did stop, we looked for an eddy. Without that pool of

slow-moving water, we had to turn toward the bank, paddle upstream like mad, and grab onto any bankside vegetation. Spirits soared when the sun appeared from behind the clouds. When the skies darkened, so did morale.

Meanwhile, Carter squeezed into another assistant’s boat, and they snuggled their way downriver. I came around a bend to find the crew gathered smiling and cheering on one of the few unsubmerged gravel beaches. Carter’s boat had generously hung up in an eddy and waited patiently for rescue.

Our goal the first day was to bounce six miles downriver, where the South Fork of the Sun joins the West Fork. Most of us made the takeout by 5 p.m. Others arrived a few hours later. No one was dry, but the sun was shining, and it was warm enough. Maddie instructed the Scouts to search for a campsite and a suitable tree in which to hang the food. This was, after all, prime grizzly country.

The Scouts slept under one large tarp, held aloft with boat paddles and guy lines. The trek assistants did the same. The moon was slow to rise. The longer I stared at the darkening sky, the more stars appeared, then the milkiest



Milky Way I had ever seen. It had been a long day, made even longer thanks to the summer solstice. On this trip, participants live every minute of daylight.

### DOWN THE RIVER

In the morning, Gene met me in the cooking area, a few hundred yards away from the shelters. In a mild but noticeable Jersey accent, he told me he was starting at Gonzaga after he made it out of the Bob. He played football in school, but his knee kept him from pursuing it. He wants to study business administration and pursue an MBA or law school.

“Do you think you were prepared for this trip?” I asked.

“Definitely,” he said. “I trained for this. I went to the gym and went on hikes with weighted packs.”

He wasn't lying. Gene was ready. He was unphased at the shakedown hike, patiently waiting for the rest of the crew to catch up, myself included. He had read all the literature that MOHAB provided participants before the trip. He did the workouts. If he didn't have the right gear, he bought the best he could afford. “You buy it nice, or you buy it twice,” he said. “Dry bags and a good sleeping bag are key. There's nothing

better at the end of the day than grabbing my dry fleece and putting it on.” Some participants relied on garbage bags and Ziploc bags. That doesn't work.

The Scouts and trek assistants gathered to make a breakfast of oatmeal and coffee. Some were planning to hike their rafts up the West Fork and then float back down to camp. I said my goodbyes to the crew and wished them luck on the rest of their journey.

The day after I left, they broke camp and floated another six miles to the intersection with the North Fork of the Sun. From a base camp, they hiked up and floated back down the North Fork, which was mellow until Gene flipped in rapids and was able to grab his boat and gear. After six days in one of the wildest places in the Lower 48, the Scouts and their trek assistants hiked around Gibson Reservoir to the shuttle vans.

“I would recommend this to anyone looking to get the most out of Boy Scouts in terms of adventure,” Gene said. “A lot of people talk about other camps, but none of them offer programs like MOHAB. In the Bob, you are out there. This is the most adventure you can possibly have.” ■

### MOHAB BY THE NUMBERS

- 86 – Average number of Scouts attending annually
- 20.6 – Average number of river miles per trip
- 20.1 – Average number of miles hiked per trip
- 12 – Number of female scouts who complete a trek annually

### 2023 TREK INFO

- Five six-day sessions
- June 18 through July 22
- Cost: \$4,500 per crew (max 12), plus \$300 per participant
- Open to boys, girls, troops, and individuals



Scan this QR code for more info

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OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Scouts bail out their inflatable bathtubs. Gene Budsock is still smiling after a week in the woods.

LEFT: Tents are no more than tarps under Montana's big sky. ABOVE: Scouts pack all of their gear, plus paddles, helmets, life jackets, and a thirst for adventure.

