

# The Knob Hike

Sponsored by the Ecology/Conservation Area

The Knob Hike began as an evening program activity of the Ecology/Conservation area in 1980, and provides a pseudo-aerial view of Raven Knob Scout Reservation and the surrounding area, as well as giving an oral history of the reservation.

While the Knob Hike is a scheduled opportunity to visit the reservation's namesake landmark, Scouts may make the climb at other times as well. Scouts should have the permission of their unit leader, and should travel in groups of at least three. Allow at least 90 minutes for the round trip, and avoid climbing near or after dark.

Congratulations! You have now arrived at Raven Knob. You have just climbed 500 vertical feet. Lake Sabotta below you is the lowest point in camp, at an elevation of 1252 feet above sea level. The point where you stand is approximately 1790 feet above sea level, and the top of this ridge is 1905 feet.

Raven Knob gets its name from the fact that ravens, which are large members of the crow family, used to nest in this area. In fact, this is one of the few places on the East Coast

where ravens can be found. Most of the ravens now have moved to Pilot Mountain, located in eastern Surry County. This is the reason that the top of Pilot Mountain has been closed to the public.

Also, if you look below at Lake Sabotta, which was named after Mr. John Sabotta of Mount Airy, you will see that it looks like a raven. In fact, you can see a raven from two different angles. If you look toward the Order of the Arrow arena, you can see the head, with the wing extending toward the rowboats at the waterfront, and the body out toward the dam. Or, you can look toward the rowboats and see the head, with the creek being a worm in its mouth. The wing would extend toward the Order of the Arrow arena, and the body again out toward the dam.

## The Watershed

As you follow the ridge from the top of the mountain, it will dip down and up and finally curve back around to the right to Raccoon Mountain. Raccoon Mountain is the

highest point on Raven Knob property. The left-hand peak is just over 2000 feet above sea level, while the right-hand peak is 2240 feet above sea level.

Directly across from you is Warrior Mountain (there is a line of trees, a small gap, some more trees, another small gap - that is Warrior Mountain). That ridge is the back property line of Raven Knob, and ranges in elevation from 1400 to 1600 feet. The entire reservation encompasses some 3200 acres.

All of this land makes up the Raven Knob watershed. A watershed is an area of land where all the water falling on that land goes to a specific point or outlet. In the case of Raven Knob, that point is Lake Sabotta.

A watershed is a lot like a cereal bowl — if you pour milk in a cereal bowl, it will all go to the bottom. If you pour it on the edge, some will go into the bowl, and some will spill out onto the table.

If you notice the slope of the land, any runoff water (that is, water that does not soak into the ground) will flow either directly into Lake Sabotta or Lake Watson, or into one of the two creeks: the Endicutt Creek, which flows behind the Commissioner's area and the Ecology/Conservation area and back beyond Wilderness Camp, or the Little Endicutt Creek, which flows behind Sam Houston and Buffalo Bill campsites and back into the woods.

We are fortunate in that we own all of the land in our watershed, because we can control what goes into the water in the creeks and the lake. If we didn't, then someone upstream from us could dump something into one of the creeks, destroying the quality of water in the that creek, and eventually, in the lake.

The water in all of the creeks and in the lake is tested periodically throughout the summer to make sure it is safe for drinking, swimming, and other uses.

For those who wonder why Lake Watson is so nasty-looking, that is because it was designed as a siltation lake. Silt, or sediment, that washes downstream from the creek collects in Lake Watson, and thus stays out of Lake Sabotta.

## Camp History

Raven Knob was first used as a Scout camp in 1954 (although many claim that its first "official" year was 1955). Before that, it was a public park owned by a pair of brothers. They, and several other small landowners, sold the land to the Old Hickory Council when they were unable to make a profit running the park.

However, we did not own the land you are standing on until the late 1960s. A woman

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owned this part of the ridge, and decreed in her will that the land should be sold to the Boy Scouts upon her death. Several other area landowners have similar clauses in their wills dealing with land that borders the reservation.

The official name of the entire 3200 acres is Raven Knob Scout Reservation. The developed part of the reservation is called Camp Raven Knob. But many years ago, this area used to be referred to as Buzzard Rock. Believe it or not...

The building that is now the trading post (which is obscured from view) was originally a dinner club where dances were often held.

According to legend, a man was shot in there, right beside the fireplace, reportedly in a dispute over a woman.

When Raven Knob opened as a Scout camp, that building became the first dining hall. The kitchen area was in the area now used by the Trading Post staff as sleeping quarters.

The first trading post was a shelter across the creek from there. The shelter was open on all sides, and had hinged boards to lock it up at night. When the new dining hall was built, and the old one converted to the present trading post, that shelter was moved to Iroquois campsite, where it remains today.

Also in that same area, there was a small outdoor bowling alley, a leftover from the public park days.

The two staff cabins across from the Commissioner's area were built by the two brothers for use by their families while visiting the park.

The log cabin was originally two tobacco barns, which used to be in the area near the softball field. The two were pushed together to form living quarters. Kyle Norman, the first camp ranger (until the early 1970s), lived there for a time.

The oldest building in camp is the Wilderness cabin, located at the Wilderness base camp. It was also a home for Mr. Norman and his wife Mary, and was refurbished and converted to a base cabin in the early 1970s, with the backing of Mr. Don Powell, who helped organize the Wilderness Camp program. The current Pathfinders' program is an outgrowth of that program.

The original Aquatics area had an F-shaped wooden dock, which was replaced by the current dock in the late 1960s. Also, there was a boat dock between the current waterfront and the Order of the Arrow arena, which was used when the camp was a public park.

If you stand at the Aquatics area and look out toward the dam, you will see an area where the lake narrows. That area — called "the point" because of a large rock outcropping there — is the location of the old dam, which was replaced by the current one in the 1950s, still in the public park days. In 1981, when the lake was dry, you could plainly see the remnants of the old dam, and you could also see the remains of stumps where trees were cut to build the lake. Lake Sabotta is a man-made lake.

Also while at the Aquatics area, look up at the top of the ridge above the Knob. You will see an area that looks like it had once been cut. In fact, it has. In 1970, Mike Fischesser, then on the Scoutcraft staff, clear-cut an area at the top of the ridge and built a signal

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tower. Although the tower lasted only that one summer, "Fischesser's Notch" remains a part of camp lore.

And for those of you who were wondering, Lake Sabotta went dry in 1981 because the drainpipe buried beneath the dam rusted out to the point that the flow of water could not be controlled. The drainpipe was completely replaced that fall, and the lake was back to normal the next summer.

Believe it or not, Lake Watson was used as the swimming lake in 1981. The lake was dredged, sand was dumped in place to make a nonswimmers' and beginners' area, and a wooden dock was built along the shoreline next to the dam. A floating dock was built and placed in the middle of the swimmers' area. At its deepest point, the Lake Watson swimmers' area was approximately eight feet deep.

The building sticking out of the trees above the lake is the Wahissa Lodge Building and Training Center. Construction began on the building in 1970, and it was dedicated in July of 1974. The founder of the Order of the Arrow, the late Dr. E. Urner Goodman, was here for the dedication. The building was dedicated in the memory of Mount Airy's Mr. G. Kellock Hale, the founder of Wahissa Lodge.

Prior to the lodge building's construction, Arrowmen preparing for various ceremonies dressed in a circus tent in what was known as the Order of the Arrow compound, in the area that is now used for Cooking merit badge. In its earlier days, that area was used as a campsite. In keeping with the Indian theme used in naming the valley sites, it was called Navajo.

As you leave camp, you will see a white aluminum shelter across from the ranger's house. That shelter was originally the Scoutcraft shelter. It was replaced by the current shelter in 1985.

Most of the roads in camp were originally built as logging roads. Cole Creek Road, which branches off of Valley Road, was a particularly heavy source of logging activity in the 1930s, as Depression-era work projects. In that time, the logs were moved out by horses, and the bare remains of a horse stable can be found along Cole Creek Road.

Speaking of trees, most of the dead trees you saw on the way up the mountain were American Chestnut trees. A blight, or disease, affected most of the the chestnut trees in the United States in 1929, virtually wiping out the species. There are still a few left, but they are extremely rare.

### **Tour of the Surrounding Area**

If you look beyond Warrior Mountain to the the far ridge of mountains at the horizon,

that is the Blue Ridge Parkway, and those mountains are in Virginia. The Parkway runs across the top of that ridge.

Looking to your right, you see a tall mountain with what looks like a pin sticking out of it. That is Fisher's Peak, and until recently it had a fire tower on top of it. There is fire tower on Rendezvous Mountain in Millers Creek in Wilkes County, and a third tower on Turner's Mountain in White Plains, near Mount Airy. The towers are set up in groups of three to make pinpointing the location of a potential fire easier.

If you look past the top of Raccoon Mountain, you will see another two-humped mountain that looks similar to it. That is Saddle Mountain, so named because it resembles a saddle. Saddle Mountain is on the Surry County-Alleghany County border, near the Parkway. Groups from the Raven Knob Wilderness Camp used to hike there and back during their program.

To your right (just barely visible), is Skull Camp Mountain. According to legend, an escaped slave from pre-Civil War days hid in the caves on that mountain. Supposedly, a man exploring the caves found a human skull in one of them. Also, it is said that the caves on the mountain form the eyes and other features of a skull.

### **Final Notes**

The above information was collected from several present and former Raven Knob staff members. Anyone who would like to make an addition to this brochure should contact the current Ecology/Conservation Director, or the Camp Director.

For a different look at Raven Knob, consider participating in the Trailblazer, another weekly program activity, sponsored by the Scoutcraft area.

Enjoy your Knob Hike!