

# Their First Camping Trip

October, 2008

Whoops! Her foot disappeared in a small stretch of mud where the trail meets the lake. “Hold still!”, I shouted. “I’m coming!” Of course, she didn’t wait, and pulled her foot out right away. Just her foot. The sneaker was stuck several inches deep in the mud. Her sister, at times the more adventurous one, was more careful.

By some miracle, her white sock was still white, clean, not a bit of mud, as she’d lifted her foot straight up out of the hole. Nor was there any mud inside the sneaker, thank goodness. The outside was another story, but that was easily rinsed clean in the lake.

She is my older granddaughter, Rebecca, usually Becca, by name, age five and a bit. She and her sister, Emma, two years younger, were on their first camping trip<sup>1</sup>, with their mother, also known as my daughter, and some friends with their two slightly older boys. We met Saturday morning at the crowded parking area near the trailhead, stuffed everything into packs, filled water bottles, and started up the trail. Heavily used, it was wide and clear, though here and there were crowds of rocks or tangles of roots, serious obstacles for the kids. It was less than two miles from road to hut, uphill, but not very steep.

There’s not much to tell, thank the gods – no adventures. Just a lovely day, blessings on the weather god, cool and clear, with the sun sparking through the leaves, which in the middle of October were a world of colors. It was high leaf-peeper season. An easy, slow walk, and every place with a view or with a log or stones for a seat was an excuse to stop, gape, and eat gorp.

The girls had their own packs, with their “blankies”, whistles (best they not get lost in the first place), and their bandannas. Nothing heavy, but Emma is a little one, scarcely bigger than her pack. Seen from behind walking along, there’s just a blond head above and from the knees down below.

After a couple of hours pleasant walking, we arrived at the shoe-eating mud by the lake, across which we could see the hut<sup>2</sup>, standing a bit up from the water on the far shore. Another half hour saw us at the hut, signed in and in warm clothes.

The hut was actually four buildings. The main one, with the office where we’d registered, also held the kitchen and a large room with communal tables. A second small building had sinks and composting toilets. And two dormitory buildings, each with several small rooms with bunk beds. We shared our room with a couple of guys, strangers but friendly, except for occasional mumbles about “inside voices” when the girls got excited.

Until dinnertime the girls ran around collecting cones from under the trees. The sun set behind the mountains behind the hut and when it quickly became even chillier, we all went into the dining room, to read, play cards, or draw. And more of the same after dinner, at least for a little while, as we were all pleasantly tired and went early to bed.

It was a quiet night (let us not speak of the snoring from the two other fellows), except for a quiet voice at three in the morning, Becca: “I want to go home.” Then her mother: “Sh, sh, go back to sleep.

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<sup>1</sup> Not counting a night spent in a tent in the backyard.

<sup>2</sup> Lonesome Lake, and Lonesome Lake Hut, of course, the westernmost of the AMC huts.

We'll go home tomorrow, when it's light out.”

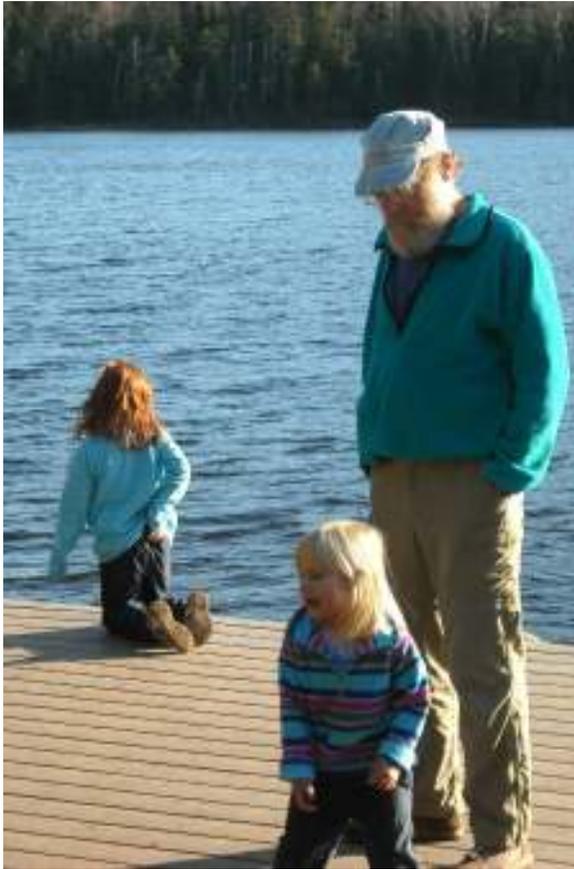
In the morning we were up and dressed quickly – it had indeed gotten cold – and washed (only cold water, to be sure) the sleep away and met the others in the dining room in time for breakfast. Along with breakfast in the huts one must also endure what is called a skit, performed by the staff (“da croo” in the jargon), something comical, they say. Every skit has three parts, three morals: “carry in, carry out”, i.e., carry out your own trash; how to fold the blankets and make the beds – any other way is strictly forbidden; and most important, of course, a reminder about the tip jar (a bit venal, it seems to me). It should be obvious that I could well do without their efforts, but that's an old story and I kept my mouth shut. The kids ate it up.

After breakfast we packed everything and set off. Before heading down, we went the rest of the way around the lake, until we came again to the mud-trap (this time uneventfully). From there we went back the same way we'd come up. We probably even stopped at the same stones and logs. In a couple of hours we were back in the crowded and busy campground by the highway, just in time to eat our lunch at one of the picnic tables.

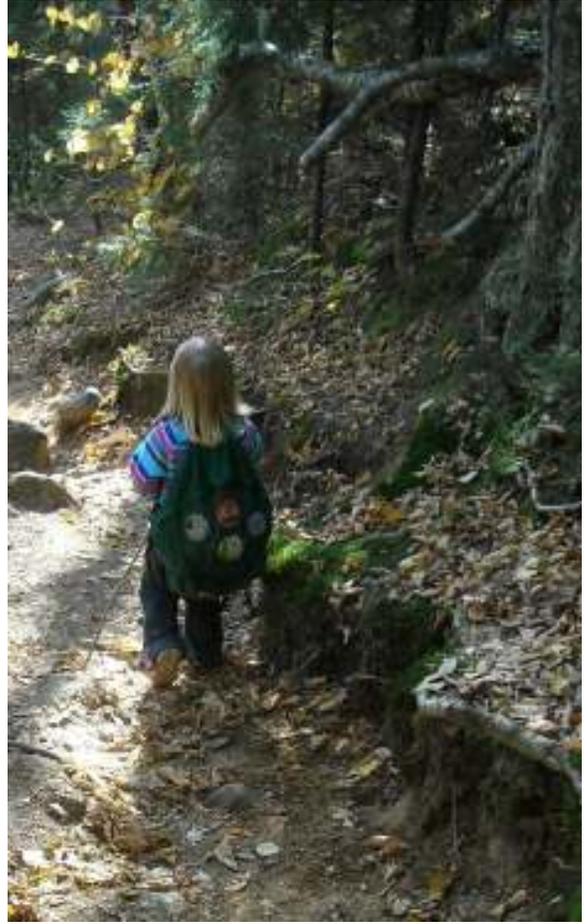
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The Mud-Trap



Waiting for dinner



Emma's pack



Becca (with her mother's pack)

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