

Klondike

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On Friday, February 22nd, around ten of our boy scouts arrived in Nagano at around 8:00 PM to attend this year's Klondike. After unloading all of the Troop's gear and equipment, we entered our cabins, which was already in use by Troop 610.

A Klondike is a snow-based Scouting event in the winter season. For our district, it is held annually in Nagano prefecture, where many of the district's troops gather to compete in a series of events. Throughout the camp, each troop or "patrol" has one leader from a different patrol keep track of the patrol's points. As these points can be added or taken away in almost any way, including the events, the patrol sled, cabins, and even attitude, each patrol aims for the same goal; to win the most amount of points and to go home as Klondike winners.

At 6:00 AM, all of the Scouts woke up to eat breakfast and gather outside, leading to the start of the event. After we were assigned out score tracker, who was the patrol leader for troop 610, we were assessed on the functionality and aesthetics of our sled. We met most of the requirements, including a few that were generously overlooked by the point trackers who disagreed with the sled requirements.

The first official event was the sled race. This had used to be the main event, which was a big race around and through the campsite in the forest including all of the patrols and sleds. But, due to a lack of snow, that had changed this year. Rather than being the main, final event, it was now the least important event. Also, instead of a mostly flat course that we had to run on, we were forced to run on a very steep, icy hill, which had many places for the possibility of slipping. Just a few seconds after the whistle had been blown, one of our troop members had already slipped as we scrambled to push and pull our sled, trying to somehow drag it up the harsh hill. Although we had had a bad start, we made an excellent recovery, and ended with a decent time, just enough to stay in the game.

After that, we moved onto the second event, which required our brains more than the physical, unlike last time. It was a fire-building test, which put both out totin' chits and firem'n chips to use. Our task was to cut pieces of wood, and build and start a strong-enough fire to make cups of hot chocolate for ourselves as quickly as possible, compared to the other teams. After the starting whistle was blown, we yet again faced an immediate problem; we didn't have a saw. All other groups had proper saws to cut their wood with, while we had one pocket knife, which wasn't going to do much to a thick piece of wood. This required half of our group to take turns furiously cutting at the wood with this small pocket knife blade, while the other half went to find good pieces of tinder that could be used for the fire, which was also a hard task considering

that the ground still had lots of snow on it, and almost nothing was completely dry, which was quite an important part in starting a good fire.

After what felt like quite a long time cutting and searching, we were able to start a small flame. Even though it was small and obviously too weak to boil any water, it was a start. We were able to add to that small flame bit by bit, adding wood and fanning. By the time we were finally able to start boiling water, most teams were already drinking their hot chocolate in their mugs. As we looked at the other patrols sipping their mugs full of the warm liquid, we came to another realization; we didn't have our own hot chocolate mix. Although we had been told that we could share a big box of mix with all of the other patrols, that was clearly not the case as one patrol claimed that it was for their use only. We were still far from having boiled water in the bowl when one of our troop members finally got back to get their own "Swiss Mix" from the cabins. This event definitely set us back in terms of points compared to the other patrols, as they had finished way before us, with much more efficiency.

Before lunch, we had one more short event to get done, which had "morse coding" as its main theme. A good amount of boys in our patrol agreed that this was their favorite event so far. We were to figure out the word that the other team was thinking about in terms of morse code signals. If we held the piece of acrylic that was given to us for a longer period of time in front of the flashlight, it was the code for a certain symbol. If held for a short amount of time, it was the code for the other symbol. Each letter was made up of these symbols, forcing us to either do or guess the symbols in order to find out each letter. In the end, these letters formed a word given to us. This activity requires a lot of concentration to keep track on the symbols and letters. Although we were not told the points for each one that we earned, it is fair to believe that that had been our best event in the morning.

After a filling lunch, we gathered again where we were given directions for the afternoon events. This next event required us to again use our scout knowledge. Our task was to treat a person with a broken leg by using a splint, and making a human stretcher to carry to the "hospital." We had five minutes to do everything to treat the person until they got to the hospital. With a time of about four minutes and forty seconds, we were able to do the event faster than a lot of other patrols, which pushed us forward into a good position.

Finally, after everyone came back together, we all gathered at the flag poles, the same place where we had gathered in the morning, to do the final event. This event was replacing the spot for where the grand sled race had been, so it obviously included everyone, and was the most competitive of them all.

As the director explained the rules for this strange final event, we were standing in front of a small forest, or group of trees, that had cutouts of cartoon mammoths leaning against trees. Each tree had a number, and each patrol had a designated number where they were to run to, throw a wooden stick, and hopefully hit or knock down the mammoth. It was best to aim at the body, as it gave the most points. At the starting whistle, the first person from each patrol was to

run as fast as they could, jumping over long pieces of tape that had been stuck onto trees. Once they got to their designated area, there would be a second signal that indicated that they could throw their arrows.

After the first whistle, our first person was gone. After the second signal, we watched intently, standing on our toes to get the angle through the trees to see if he hit the mammoth or not. As he steadily threw his arrow, it missed the mammoth slightly by going underneath it. As he got his arrow and started to run back, we realized that this was not easy. There was another whistle blow, and the second person was off. As each person ran and hit or missed the mammoth, we grew anxious knowing that our turn was coming. Out of the first four people, two of them had hit, and we had actually gained a good amount of points. For the last two people, it was a relay format, so there was no stopping in between. Unluckily, our coordinator who was standing in our designated place had not been told that clearly, which led him to stop our fifth person from getting the arrow, expecting to hear the second signal. After what seemed like ages after everyone else had ran back, the fifth person was able to start running back. Due to all of the confusion and panic, he could not clear the tape correctly, leading us to lose fifty points at once.

Following the baton pass into the final person, we felt like we had lost all hope. We had had a good amount of points, but fifty points was not going to let us stay in the same place. It seemed quite clear to us that we were not going to win the Klondike. But, as the sixth person left determined and came back with a lighter expression, we were forced to think again about our chances. Just maybe, we had hope.

A few hours after dinner, we gathered around a campfire to attend the ceremony. The reflection for the day, details about the next day, and most importantly, the awards. Right before the campfire, we had been briefly told our total points, which was around 660 points. Of course, we did not know if that was amazing, or the worst score you could possibly get, because we had no one else to compare to. Once they started to announce the three highest scoring teams, our patrol held our breath as we gazed into the fire, hearing the voice of the leader and thinking about the whole day, like the ups and downs that we had for almost every event.

“The third place team had a score of 610 points,” the director said. As soon as we heard those words, our patrol looked at each other, and smiled. It was then that we knew we had won. Our hard work had paid off.

“The second place team had a total score of 630 points,” the director continued. After the patrol sat back down into their seats after standing and greeting the director in the middle of the campfire, we held our breaths, sitting quietly to listen.

“And the first place team, Troop 5, has racked up a whopping total of 660 points!” We stood up as quickly as possible to proudly go up.

Later, our Scoutmaster mentioned that Troop 5 had never won any district event in the history of the troop. Because she had said that, we were able to realize that it wasn't always about the first place prize. Although we hadn't received a proper prize, which we were supposed

to have received, we weren't upset. We had set a new bar for our troop, and one that we could be proud of for a while. Although we had had an average score for the physical requirements needed to gain points, like inspections for our sled and cabins, and the points we had gathered from the events, we had maintained a good attitude; even when many things went wrong for us, we improvised and tried to carry on. Our perseverance had led to this win. It allowed us to feel satisfied and proud in knowing that we had done our best; that was something that you didn't always get from a first place prize.