

# History of the Klondike Derby and "Deep Freeze" at Camp Boyhaven

In 1964, the Eastern Mohawk District of Schenectady County Council, BSA held its first mid-winter out-of-door camping event at Camp Boyhaven under the leadership of Tony Filardi, Program Chairman, and Dick Huether, District Commissioner. It was a fun weekend that included construction of snow shelters, skiing, and snow-shoeing, topped off with an overnight survival experience under canvas: the "Deep Freeze".

A year or two later, Bob Honeyman, successor of Tony Filardi, introduced the formal patrol competition with a number of skill events that were presented at various locations in camp. This activity became the "Klondike Derby" as it duplicated an event held in Alaska under very similar conditions. Recently (2017), Bob passed away and his records and earliest patches and notes were passed on to current event coordinators.

The history of this event is interesting from the standpoint of tradition. It was an Eastern Mohawk District annual affair for fourteen years until 1977. During that time, Southwest District participated in 1966 and Sacandaga District was invited in 1975 to share in this high adventure experience. In 1978, Eastern Mohawk and Sacandaga Districts merged into the Mohican District, and for the next five years continued to schedule this event. The new Iroquois District joined in 1979 for the winter camping and skill events. The popularity of the Klondike Derby/Deep Freeze became so great that it finally emerged as a Schenectady County Council event in 1983. With the merger to form the Twin Rivers Council, the Klondike Derby/Deep Freeze was again a Schenectady District event but with invitations to participate extended to all other Troops in the Council.

In 1995, the Camp Boyhaven event officially became a co-district activity, bringing together the Scout Troops of Schenectady and Sir William Johnson Districts. Troops from as far away as Southboro, MA and Gettysburg, PA join us each year as well as Scouts and Scouters from other Twin Rivers Council districts. And in recent years, we have seen as many as 75 Cub Scouts and Leaders who travel to "Klondikaven" to observe the Klondike Derby events that are held on "Derby Day". In January, 2013 we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event. Fifty continuous years of wintertime fun in the Great Northeast!

The future of the Klondike Derby and Deep Freeze at Camp Boyhaven is bright. Nearly three dozen Scouters, many of whom have been involved with this event for a decade or more, come together each year to provide one of the best Scout Skills Programs around. The "well oiled machine" is started up eight months prior to the event with the annual June Staff Meeting. We meet again early in January to apply a little "spit polish" to the plan and then on Derby Weekend the "machine" goes to work to provide 300 or more Scouts with an opportunity to demonstrate their cold weather Scout skills in a friendly competitive environment.

The historical record you just read was compiled by George Loucks. He was the Klondike Derby event coordinator for about 20 years, and added an incredible amount of energy and richness to this event. When he took over, many years ago, he streamlined the event and focused it on the essential winter survival techniques and on the boys. The boys

remain the focus. About 100 volunteer adults show up each year, solely because the focus is on the boys. George passed the event coordinator responsibilities onto a couple of adult scout Klondike trainers that really believed in this event. Fortunately, George was with us for a couple years while we were learning the ropes before he passed on unexpectedly. We named an award after George for the fastest fire builders, in recognition of George "keeping the [Klondike] flame alive."

In the fall of 2017, we transitioned the Klondike Derby to Camp Wakpominee. The 55<sup>th</sup> Klondike Derby Deep Freeze was January 20, 2018. Although the administration changed a bit, but the essence of the Klondike and the events, remain the same. Quality is most important. The boys know this is a real test of adult skills, and they respond to that challenge. For the first time in decades, we were unable to hold a Klondike Derby in winter of 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although variants of the virus are currently drawing out this tragic event, we are trying to hold to our plan for a Klondike Derby January 2022.

