

Pemigewassett Newsletter

Summer 2010 Number One

We didn't necessarily wait deviously until this particular afternoon to draft the first newsletter of the 2010 season – so that we could write about the all-but perfect temperature (75 degrees with a steady northwest breeze making it feel more like, well, 70 degrees); about the vibrant blue sky backgrounding the occasional puffy cumulus cloud; or about the 10-and-under round-robin soccer tournament unfolding on the pitch outside our window with some of the excitement of the World Cup, arguably better officiating, and not a vuvuzela to be heard. Nevertheless, it is wonderful to be able to generate our first summer missive in such favorable conditions for happy and productive camping.

We're well into our third full day of Pemi's 103rd season, and the program is in full swing. As noted, the 10s are out playing the beautiful game with three of our neighboring camps, the team anchored by 4-year veteran Patterson Malcolm, talented newcomer brothers Pepe and Diego Periel, and talented second-year brothers Carson and Cortie Fischer. Meanwhile, the 12s hoops team has travelled to Camp Moosilauke just up the Baker Valley from Pemi for the inaugural roundball match of the year, led by Daniel Bowes, Bryce Grey, and Jack Purcell. As we write, the archery and track squads are practicing for upcoming events later in the week, and wafting in from the Main Lodge come the lilting sounds of various campers and staff auditioning for this year's Gilbert and Sullivan production, *HMS Pinafore*. Any minute now, Uppers 1 and 2 will be returning by bus from their day hike up Mt. Cube, the blocky granite peak right at the head of our valley, Thompson Bain, Hartwell Green, Dan Bivona and others having summited Pemi's most-climbed mountain – Thompson actually following in the footsteps of his father Andy, a camper here thirty or more years back. Returning after supper will be a smaller group including Buck Baskin, Jimmy Gorman, and Sam Papel, all of them seniors hoping to join the Katahdin expedition next week and getting their legs in shape with a quick circuit hike up Mt. Lafayette in the Franconia Range. They will have had 60- to 80- mile views from the summit today, vistas stretching all the way from Mt. Washington in the east to Mt. Mansfield and Camel's Hump in the west. So, yes, the season has well and truly begun.

Looking back over the past several days, we had a wonderful time greeting and speaking with all of you parents who dropped your boys on Saturday. (We admire your emotional fortitude, as we do every year, in driving away from the ones you love so well, and we are ever grateful for the trust you express towards us by doing so.) That night, as usual, we catered shamelessly to the culinary tastes of boys, sending tray upon tray of pizza out into the happily

resounding dining hall, only to follow the entrée with a perennial Pemi dessert favorite, ice cream Rockets. One of the non-edible highlights of the meal was Danny Kerr's welcome to the assembled multitudes as Pemi's newest director, that and the truly thunderous applause that ensued. Less momentous historically, but still engaging, was Abby Reed's appearance on – and speech from – Johanna Zabawa's shoulders, as two moderately tall co-heads of the Junior Camp announced that they were replacing the impossibly tall Rob Follansbee, last year's J.C. honcho (on sabbatical in 2010.)

Saturday night featured the inaugural campfire, indoors (yes, in a fireplace, not on the floor!) owing to threatening weather conditions, but spirited and talent-laden nevertheless. Staff members Gordon DiQuattro, Mike Benham, and Henry Eisenhart kicked things off on the five-string banjo and stand-up bass and sax respectively, courageously followed by campers Carson Fischer with a joke, Sean O'Conner demonstrating the sub-brachial air-expulsion funky noise-rendering technique (polite decorum allows us to describe it no more plainly), and The Buffalonians (Peter and Michael Montante and Daniel Fulham), with a moving ballad about their home town. (Or was it ridiculous? It was tough to tell.) Easily as unlooked-for and stunning as Susan Boyle's first appearance on *Britain's Got Talent* was Robert Loeser's rendition of "What a Wonderful World," done *a cappella* and with flawless poise and phrasing. Nick Barber surged back onto the Pemi jazz scene, joining Benham for Wayne Shorter's "Witch Hunt," Mason Challinor juggled bowling pins and anything up to twelve balls (running chain saws next week? perhaps not), and then first-year campers André Altherr and Jack Elvekrog strode in sequence into the spotlight, delivering themselves of (André) a song about the presidents and a (Jack) a song about the 50 state capitals, both of them with death-defying elocution and speed. Other staff acts ensued, including another of Nature Head Larry Davis's wry Maine stories, with Nathaniel Kaplan's riddles and Ezra Nugiel's professionally finished "Downtown" (from *Little Shop of Horrors* and not Petula Clark!) wrapping up the camper contributions. We hope for the next campfire to be under the open skies, but this one was a definite keeper.

Sunday brought the first Polar Bear dips of the season, health checks, swim tests, pick-up sports, and letters home. Many of you will have received the latter by the time you read this, and we hope that said communiqués are at least 100 words in length (including salutation to parents, siblings, and family pets) and are full of excitement and enthusiasm. As history has shown, however, these first letters can also carry some intimations of sadness mixed in with the declarations of love. Missing home is, of course, natural, and arguably a potent confirmation of family affection and solidity. Still, we know from personal

experience that to hear anything other than “Everything is going just perfectly!” can really yank on a parent’s heartstrings. Just remember that, the times when they’re happy, their last thought is to write home – and the times when they’re not, writing a sad letter seems like the only thing to do. Please do be in touch if you receive lots of such letters, or receive them over a protracted period. We’ll be more than happy to ramp up our vigilance of the ways your boys are adjusting even further. But if you can be strong and patient – and write back cheerful letters that ask your sons to describe what they’re *doing* – homesickness usually diminishes within a very few days.

Sunday’s evening meal was a whole-camp cook-out in front of the mess hall, with the picturesque panorama of Mt. Carr right there above the ballfield to enhance the cuisine. At 8PM, everyone gathered in the Lodge for an illustrated talk on the history of Pemi – the first of seven Sunday evening addresses designed to enlighten and entertain in equal measure. Tom Reed Jr. took the audience back to the first days of camp, documenting everything from our early dependence on horses for transportation and pond-cut ice for refrigeration to the enduring comradeship to be found in mountain trips, team play, and song.

Monday marked the start of occupations, our daily instructional activities, and featured over seventy offerings in sports, nature, music, and art. The weather held perfectly, letting us get our daily routine established with a vengeance. In the afternoon, the 15s Ultimate Frisbee juggernaut headed off to some neighboring camps for the kick-off sports competition of the year, and came home having out-scored its collective opponents 11 to 10. The fact that the score in actual matches was Pemi 1 Opponents 2 scarcely detracted from the fact that a good time was had by all. Coach Cory Fauver has already written an article that will appear in this winter’s bound volume of *Bean Soup*, and we’ll observe the no-spoiler ethic by holding back all of the details for now. He did, though, sing the praises of Mason Challinor, Peter Ionno, David Levi, Jonathan Kenkel, Nick Barber, Nate Kraus and numerous others in this most civilized and Athenian of games. Read all about this, and all other Pemi undertakings, this December.

Speaking of *Bean Soup*, last night’s was the first reading of that august journal’s 101st volume. Joining second-year editor Ian Axness on the editorial perch was Dwight Dunston, who quickly demonstrated that his verbal deftness as an English major at Dickinson College (who is additionally headed off to earn an MFA in poetry at the University of East Anglia) is buttressed by trenchant social insight (noticeably satiric) and biting wit. Such is the stuff of great *Bean Soup* editors, and Axness and Dunston promise to be one of the best duos of recent decades. The staff having been here for over ten days and the boys only three,

the first ladling of the Soup was, as usual, somewhat fuller of staff “news” than camper. But next week’s reading will overflow with accounts of this week’s camper goings on, and we look forward to seeing your sons blushing to the accounts of their athletic triumphs, laughing at their foibles revealed, and sharing the unique bond that comes from a community that knows how to see the joke in everything without ever (well, hardly ever!) sacrificing understanding and common cause for the sake of a quick laugh. The boys’ love of the Monday night institution was evident from the very first, as Ian and Dwight found their way to the front of the room amidst wild shouts and applause. The tuition-paying audience’s potential to be meaningful contributors themselves was equally evident in some extremely witty haiku penned by Harry Eifler and Henry Pletcher, among others. All in all, it was a fitting way to cap the third day of camp (and not least welcome, in the eyes of this writer, for the fact that the questionably desirable award for “Director of the Week” is now, by virtue of Danny’s having joined us, very likely to go every once in a while to someone other than yours truly.)

Well, that’s it for now. Danny and I will follow with more in a week; look on-line for pictures of the 2010 season; and please see the Pemi blog for bios of the 2010 Pemi staff.

-- Tom Reed, Jr.