

Corps of Discovery travel out West

By: SGM Keith Taylor

Twenty-seventh of June, six-thirty in the morning, the "Corps of Discovery 2002" is finally getting on the road. After 10 months of planning, fundraising, motivating the eventual members of the group (and their parents) and sweating the multitude of details necessary for a trip of this nature and scope, we finally get to start the fun part of the adventure. This is the second trip we've taken out West with students, and sadly to say it's also the last (we're getting too old to keep up with teenagers). The reason for both trips was to expose as many Rockcastle students as we could to a part of our country that few of them would see otherwise. We also felt it was a great educational opportunity to allow the students to actually visit areas of our country they have studied in their history and geography classes over the years and to compare and contrast life here in rural Kentucky with living conditions in the West.

This trip, as well as the trip four years ago were both highly successful in meeting those goals. Along the way, we also had a lot of fun, as well as learning to deal with the necessary hardships of traveling over 4,500 miles in 19 days with 14 people in a school bus, camping out every night and cooking most of our own meals outside over a fire or Coleman stove.

It takes a special group to make a trip like this, and we were blessed to have the right kids to take along. Members of the "Corps of Discovery '02" were Tim Tyler, Johnathan Noe, Jacob Helton, Brian Bullock, Chris Eldridge, John Phelps, Joe Husband, Justin Cornelius, Jessica Toothman, Erik Stallworth, along

with group leaders Jenny and Keith Taylor. Our daughter, Tami, also decided to follow us to South Dakota in her Blazer for a little vacation.

The students were split into three tents. Both A-Team and B-Team had five students each. A and B teams alternated duties as Kitchen Police and Tent Detail. In addition to this, John and Chris were assigned to permanent bus detail, responsible for organizing and securing equipment on the bus.

The following is a journal of our trip, covering Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska and Colorado.

Day 1 - June 27, 2002
Departed RCHS at 6:30 a.m. Arrived at Graham Cave State Park in Missouri where we spent the night after making Sloppy Joes for supper. Hot and muggy night with plenty of mosquitoes. States traveled in were Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and Missouri. Long boring miles.

The one point of interest we stopped at was the St. Louis Arch, symbolizing the gateway to the West. The arch is the largest stainless steel structure in the world and is an amazing feat of engineering. On the way back to the bus we got caught in a real downpour. Ms. Jenny danced a jig every time lightning struck nearby. Justin was struck by the changes in the landscape along the way from home to Graham Cave as well as finding the arch is much larger than expected. Brian was interested in the change in the city skyline from the time construction was started on the arch to today. The whole group was also fascinated with the talking trash cans in the

McDonalds where we ate lunch. In fact, they spent the entire meal feeding trash into the can.

Day 2 - June 28, 2002
Departed Graham Cave, Arrived at Lewis and Clark State Park in Iowa where we spent the night after eating hot dogs cooked over a camped fire. We were right on the lakeshore. Four years ago we almost got carried away by mosquitoes, this year there wasn't any at all. States traveled in were Missouri and Iowa. Pretty landscape, just too much of it.

The only points of real interest were the only reproductions in the world of the keel boat and pirogues used by Lewis and Clark in the original "Corps of Discovery" in 1804. The kids had a real quick tour of the boats after swimming in the lake, which used to be a channel of the Missouri River. All of them remarked on how the lake bottom was real slimy mud. I'm not really sure what they expected in the bottom of the lake.

Kids seemed fascinated in sign for McDonald's that just said McStop.

Day 3 - June 29, 2002
Departed Lewis and Clark State Park, after a detailed tour of keel boat. Arrived at Snake Creek, State Park in South Dakota where we spent the night. States traveled in were Iowa and South Dakota.

Before we departed Lewis and Clark State Park, we got a really great tour and educational talk from one of the builders of the reproduction keel boat. Learned some really interesting facts not only about the keel boat, but also about the diet and equipment used by the original ex-

pedition. We learned that the original boat weighed approximately the same as a Greyhound Bus when it was loaded. The crew, with an average of 19-years old, each ate about 12 to 15 pounds of meat a day. As the ranger pointed out, take 48 quarter-pounds from McDonalds and throw the bread away.

Stopped in Yankton, South Dakota to restock supplies and get more ice. Bought five pounds of lunch in the parking lot of a grocery store. It's Tim Tyler's 18th birthday today. Jenny got him a birthday cake, card, balloons and a banner. Figured we would skip the ice cream since it was 105 degrees.

Arrived at Snake Creek fairly early in the afternoon. There is no way to describe the view, other than to say it is absolutely awesome. An enormous lake is formed by a dam further down the Missouri River. The water is so blue that it doesn't even look real, and you can see forever. The wind is blowing pretty strong and building up some fairly large waves out across the lake. We set out a little gear just to stake out our campsite while everyone goes swimming. The wind is blowing pretty strong and building up some fairly large waves out across the lake. We set out a little gear just to stake out our campsite while everyone goes swimming.

After supper, we all walk across the road to a scenic overlook to watch a beautiful sunset. Upon returning to camp I decided the wind was blowing way too hard to set up tents, so we just bed down under the stars.

Neither Jenny or I get much sleep due to the wind, which seems to get stronger every minute. Finally, at around two in the morning, I got worried about where some of the boys were sleeping. After waking them up and moving them away from the trees they were near, we tried to get some sleep. Around four in the morning, during a fifteen second time span, the wind went from the strongest I've ever experienced to dead calm. Talk about weird.

Day 4 - June 30, 2002
Departed Snake Creek State Park. Arrived at Cedar Pass Campground

in Badlands National Park after a fairly eventful day.

Upon waking up at Snake Creek, and comparing comments about the wind last night, we ate a quick breakfast and loaded the bus. Before leaving though, we had a short group prayer in a small wayfarens chapel. On crossing the Missouri the landscape changes immensely. The topography is much more rugged with long sweeping views. This is definitely horse and cattle country. We're traveling state roads now, and other vehicles are few and far between.

Shortly after getting back onto the interstate, we visit a reproduction "1880's Town." The kids seemed to enjoy looking around, and we missed some staged gun fights. Tim and Jay dressed up as gunslingers while Jessica dressed as a saloon girl (Honest, Mr. Hale, I had nothing to do with it). After eating sandwiches on the bus again, we headed on down the highway to our next scheduled stop.

The students first view of Badlands National Park was supposed to be from the seat of a helicopter. Due to the wait involved though, we de-

cided to go set up camp in the park, then head back to the helicopter ride. While setting up camp, my mother and father showed up. They were traveling in the area, and decided to meet up with us here and a couple of other places we were planning to visit in the next several days.

None of the kids had ever rode in a helicopter before, so it was really interesting to watch their faces as they boarded, then took off for the mini-flights. It was probably kind of mean for my father (who retired from the Air Force) and I to talk about our flying experiences. All but two students flew, and they all seemed to really enjoy the experience. Except Jessica, she almost hyperventilated, after she got back on the ground. She went up though.

After the helicopter rides, Jenny went with Tami to pick up some hamburger for supper, while I took the kids to a "name" prairie dog town. They all really got a kick out of getting close enough to touch some of the "p-dogs." Derrick even managed to pick one up and hold it while it ate a peanut out of his hand! It was also here that I got my first big trouble on the trip. I didn't take any photos. If



Badlands of South Dakota



Jay, Jessica and Tim at the 1880's Town



Corps of Discovery '02 - Photo courtesy of Faded Photographs - Cody, WY

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