

First Time at August Camp

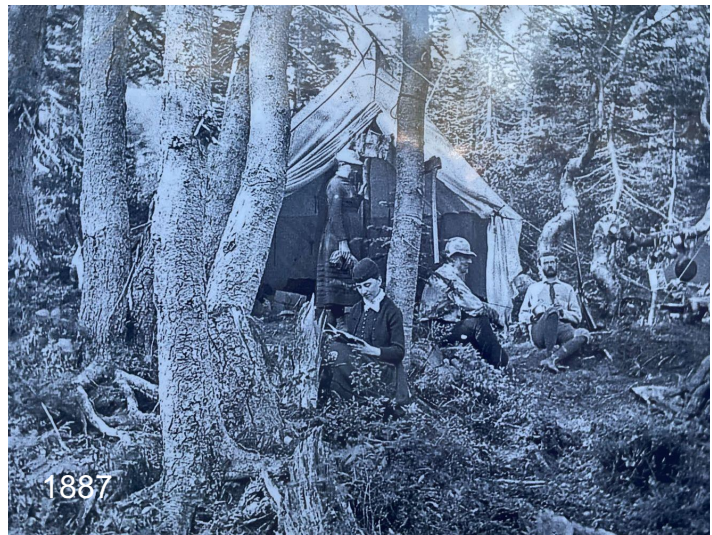
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We didn't *really* know what to expect.

Of course, certain things were clear and simple: Tent camping, with good cots for sleeping off the ground and enough headroom to stand up. Plenty of food from a sophisticated outdoor kitchen. No hot water, but you will be surprised by how effective a solar shower can be. And hiking, every day (plus or minus the optional activities), with choices according to interest and ability.

So we knew a lot, but we knew very little. What will it *really* be like? Will we be able to keep up with the group? Do we have it in us to get breakfast, get organized, and get on the trail every day? Will the food really be so great, considering our dietary preferences? Will we fit in socially? Putting our names in for August Camp, and accepting once our names were picked from the virtual hat, was a leap of faith. That leap was informed by the fact that trustworthy folks from the Delaware Valley chapter told us how great it is.

The materials and other information that came with our acceptance - the detailed packing list, the comprehensive online orientation session - told us something that's reinforced by every aspect of the August Camp experience: These folks have been doing this for a very long time (since 1887, to be exact). They have been keeping notes. August Camp works in well-established ways, even as those ways evolve with the times (it wasn't possible in 1887 to text the Transportation Coordinator).



As new campers (get used to being called campers - it's true, and it's charming), we had an Ambassador who was just a text or phone call away to answer pre-camp questions, and then was nearby (without hovering) to see that we got settled at camp. As first timers, we had green lanyards for our name tags, which signaled "this person might need a pointer now and then."

But in reality, the well-established rhythm of the day makes it easy to catch on: Reveille, coffee time, breakfast, gather your things, meet up with your hiking group, the day's hike, chill time or maybe a swim at the stream where the locals go, dinner, more chill time, campfire, bedtime. The rhythm happily repeats, the days sufficiently full and active that you most likely will be tired when you get back home, yet never at a pace that feels overwhelming or even rushed.

The centerpiece of each day - the hike - also felt "just right." At campfire each evening, our hike leaders described the routes so that we could make informed choices based on our abilities and

interests. From our site near Mount Hood, there were trails cut into the cliffs high above the Columbia River, and trails through dense old growth forest. There were routes that required us to keep moving at the planned pace, and routes designed for stopping to identify the flowers. A hike could include sun-baked stretches that had us remembering to keep drinking, and a half mile later a spot to lie down in the snow. The week's hikes were a curated catalog of what the region had to offer, updated throughout the week as our hike leaders assessed conditions and learned what was most popular with the group.

On the final evening of August Camp, the postings of the next day's hikes on the community bulletin board have been replaced by the airport travel schedule. At campfire, there are no next-day hikes to describe. How do we fill the time? Follies! The annual vaudevillian review of skits and songs and whatever else people came up with. An hour or so of grownups displaying their full willingness to be silly, and occasionally deeply touching, with each other. A return to the lesser inhibitions of childhood, sprinkled with just a bit of adult emotion. A far better way to spend our final evening than organizing stuff that can easily be crammed into our bags and sorted out when we get home.



At August Camp you will meet people who are super-outgoing, people who are quiet and reserved, people who are outrageously funny, people who are deeply thoughtful, people of different national origins and ethnicities, people with different life pursuits and professions, all of whom are there because they love the land and love walking it together. No one will tell you how to be, other than to be a fellow camper and fellow hiker. The last two items on the official packing list are adventurous spirit and sense of humor. No one seemed to have forgotten those two items.