

Ozzie's Running Blind Adventure Camp, 2014 Trip Recap



Group photo at Mackinaw with our Adventure Camps shirts on!

1st row (kneeling): Brittany, Mark and Melinda

2nd row: Hal, Cattie, Liza, Leah, Aric, Halen, Nicole, Taylor and Austin

3rd row: Amy, Abby, Ahmed, Dustin, Yong, Donovan, Khan, Kat, Aamone (hidden) & Kelly
(Missing are Ozzie and Renee.)

Hello Friends, the first annual Running Blind Adventure Camp just completed a few days ago. By all accounts it was a wonderful success and the kids and staffers all had a great time, and I want to thank those of you that helped make it possible with your generous donations. Above is the group shot we took from Fort Michilimackinac with the Mackinaw Bridge in the background. Below is a recap of the trip with some more photos. (More photos will be posted on our website at www.runningblind.org) I hope you take the time to glance through this and also visit the website.

Day 1 - Sunday July 13 – travel to Beaver Island



The boat pulling out headed for Beaver Island.



Liza, Nicole and Mark on the boat

The group actually met on Saturday night and stayed at the house of camp director Gwen Botting and her mother. (the girls were at one house, the guys at another!) They had to catch a 2:30 ferry and with a 4 hour drive, they didn't want to chance having to wait on campers that might show up late so they gathered early. They left on time and made the drive in 3 vans and a large trailer and made it to the ferry in plenty of time and after a fun 2 hour boat ride with spirits running high, they cruised to the island. They got lost for a short while trying to find the campground, but soon did and set up camp at the St James Campground which is rustic and isolated and is directly on the shore of Lake Michigan.

Day 2 - Monday July 14th – day 1 on Beaver Island

On the agenda for Monday was to meet with some people from the CMU research station located on the island. The CMU staffers lead them for a hike up a sand dune to the highest point on the island. It was a challenging hike, but some also mentioned that as a favorite activity on the island. There was some requisite playing in the sand along the way and the gang had a great time. The afternoon was spent back at the camp having fun playing games and singing. Later that evening, the group visited the house of a local historian and gave everyone a colorful lecture on the unusual history of the island including Mormon King Strang, and the fishing and maritime history of the region.



Getting read to head up the dune with the CMU staff. Brittany under the sand!

Day 3 - Tuesday July 15th – day 2 on Beaver Island

The planned activity for Tuesday (visit of a local goat farm) had to be moved to Wednesday, so the group ended up taking a hike to Iron Ore Bay. They drove part way there and hiked the last few miles. Hiking is always a great part of a camp experience and the kids had a good time. For lunch they had a picnic at an inland lake and later the kids did some wading for fun. After that it was back to camp for more games and fun. They were cooking breakfasts and dinners over the fire, so that was part of the camp fun on the island also.

Day 4 - Wednesday July 16th – day 3 on Beaver Island

To start a busy 3rd day, the group met up with the CMU crew again, and this time went on a swamp hike that included a chance to be introduced to a lot of baby snakes that are plentiful there in the swamp. They were allowed to hold them, set them around their neck or even lay them on their stomachs if they cared to try that. The kids loved the marsh and the snakes so this was a big hit. During the hike the kids also met with one of CMU's Bio 100 high school classes and got to interact with them.



Liza and Halen with baby snakes.



Ozzie with a grown up snake.

The goat farm visit was moved to Wednesday afternoon. This event was initially unplanned, but one of the other island hosts had a friend with a farm and suggested a visit, so I jumped on it and set it up. I was glad I did as it went very well with the kids interacting with goats, chickens, dogs and other livestock. They got to milk a goat and try some fresh chilled goat's milk if they wanted to and they all got a bar of goat's milk soap. A number of kids mentioned this as the favorite activity on the island.



Nicole, Liza and Brittany with baby goat. Nicole and Brit hugging a happy dog!

Day 5 - Thursday July 17th – day 4 on Beaver Island

On Thursday morning after breakfast the group met with a couple of local volunteers to take a hike to little sand bay and do a bird watching and listening hike. They got a lecture on the natural history of the island before setting off on the hike. Unfortunately by the time they got to Little Sand Bay, most of the birds were out of the area, so the picking was slim, but they found a few that some of the campers could see and that all could listen to their call. They then had the afternoon off but got busy packing up as this was their last night on the island and they had an early ferry to catch.

Later that evening they were all treated to a visit to the Beaver Island Music Festival which opened that evening. They listened to a few acts and then headed off to a local restaurant for a final dinner treat on the island – with no camp cooking required. Then it was back to camp to a camp fire for the final night on the island before the return ferry ride to the mainland the next day. As the weather was warming throughout the week, most of the kids and a few of the staffers choose to sleep under the stars right on the beach on the final night on the island, which was a fitting way to bring this part of the trip to a close sleeping under the stars and moon.



1) Birding hike 2) sun rising over Lake Michigan after the final night on the island.

Day 6 - Friday July 18th – leaving Beaver Island and heading to Lake Charlevoix

The group had to catch an 11:20 AM ferry boat ride back to Charlevoix so they were up early striking camp and packing up. They made the ferry and I then met them in Charlevoix for the remainder of the trip. I was a few minutes late to the boat (due to a delay by another ferry – the Ironton ferry which was backed up) so I missed them by only a few minutes, but then caught up to them at their campsite at Whiting County Park. On the way there I got a lot of firewood so the group could have camp fires every night for the rest of the camp. The group set up camp and headed for the sandy beach and went swimming in Lake Charlevoix – which has warmed up nicely and is much warmer than Lake Michigan this year. Then it was off to the Wolfe property on Cedar Lane just down the road from their camp for a BBQ dinner of burgers and brats which myself and friend Renee had gotten ready for them. We had also rented chairs and set up a canopy tent of mine to make the beach there inviting for the large group to carouse along the beach there. After dinner we had a bonfire and I passed out the special camp shirts I'd gotten made up to all the campers and staffers – everyone got a shirt which they greatly enjoyed. We then treated the kids to my specialty – a lakeside fireworks display right on the beach. (A large group of our neighbors also came to watch that as they had been notified that I was going to give the show.) Everyone enjoyed the fireworks and the day ended late around 11 PM when the gang headed back to their campsites at Whiting.



Renee grilling up burgers & brats at BBQ. Fun around the campfire toasting marshmallows!

Day 7 - Saturday July 19th – 1st day at Charlevoix



Austin and others at the track at East Jordan H.S.

We started off on Saturday with a trip to the track at East Jordan High School. (Got to add some track and field to a Running Blind excursion!) We spent most of the morning there and gave the kids a lesson on track and field that focused on the benefits of distance running as a lifelong activity. We went through warm up and stretching, talked about stride, pacing and training, and had them run a mile in 4 segments as we went through all of this. A couple of the kids were good runners, some where not, but they were all good sports and stuck with it. (Two kids – Nicole Wieferich and Khan Hanadan - had actually gotten scholarships from attending the Michigan Blind Athletic Associations annual Sports Education Camp, and a 3rd - Austin Shepherd - runs on his Jr High track and CC teams.)

After the track & field session we headed to Cedar Lane for lunch and then for some fun on the lake with boats for some ever popular summer activities - inner-tubing and swimming. I have a speed boat I keep up there and we rented a nice, large pontoon boat and both of them were busy all afternoon pulling tubers – 3 at once on a raft behind the pontoon driven by Renee and 2 at once in traditional tubes behind my boat. Volunteer lifeguard Gordon Willenborg was on the beach supervising the swimming. We stayed out on the boats all afternoon trading kids back and forth between boats and then called it quits in time for another BBQ at the Wolfe cabin featuring bbq chicken and tossed salad. (Turns out the kids liked iceberg lettuce better than baby spinach!)



1) Pontoon boat 2) tubing on the 3 man; 3) Cattie & Leah; 4) Ahmed at the grill – bbq#2.

Day 8 – Sunday July 20th – 2nd day at Charlevoix

Sunday was planned to be a bit of a slow morning so people could relax and unwind a bit – especially the staffers, many of whom hadn't had any time off for a number of weeks. There was time for some sunning and swimming at Cedar lane.



Khan and Liza on the deck at Cedar Lane. Melinda getting dumped off a tube in the lake.

Then we had lunch and headed off for what we thought would be a lazy float down the Jordan River in 6 person rafts. What we discovered was that it was anything but leisurely. I

had made the trip down the river previously in a canoe a couple of times, but I underestimated the added difficulty the rafts presented. We were careful about making sure to have fully sighted people in every raft and tried to balance the strength of the rowers, but we underestimated the need for skillful navigation to avoid the snags that littered the river caused by downed trees that were generally not cleared, or if so only enough to get around or under the log. Most of the boats made it fine, but there was a bit of a struggle on one of them to keep the raft from running into about every obstacle they could hit. It was a challenge but we all made it and the group was given a much larger slice of adventure than we had estimated.



Rafting the Jordon River – and dealing with the numerous tree fall obstacles!

The reward for that was a dinner at Murray's Restaurant in East Jordon. This was a much welcomed break from eating the camp food that had been provided up to that point. We stuck to the lower priced items on the menu and only allowed water as a beverage but had a good meal in the back room they reserved for us. After dinner as a reward for the efforts of the rafting trip, Renee treated the kids to ice cream at small ice cream parlor next door. Ironically, the most serious injury of the camp occurred at the ice cream parlor, when one of the staffers missed a step of the way out of the parlor and twisted an ankle, but luckily, after a trip to the ER it was only an arch strain, so I guess that was good. After that it was back to camp and off to bed for an early start on Monday morning.



Dinner at Murray's



Heading for ice cream – Ozzie & Melinda

Day 9 – Monday July 20th – 3rd day at Charlevoix



Musket demonstration at Fort Michilimackinac (it was loud!) and a cannon.

This was the biggest activity day of the trip – we headed off to Mackinaw City to visit two parts there and take an adventure trail that included a zip-line and a rock wall. We went first to Colonial Michilimackinac and toured there for a couple of hours. It was very interesting to hear about the natives and pioneer life of the early settlers in that area. There were some nice displays of pelts and wigwams that could be touched. At the Fort we listened to a description of the Voyagers that paddled the great lakes bringing in merchant goods for furs, and were allowed to handle a number of the artifacts. Inside the fort we were treated to a display of musket firing and a full description by an enthusiastic docent that told in detail about life in the Fort and in the colonial British Army. After that we got a nice talk from some archeologists that are still excavating remains of the original fort. (The original

wooden stockade style fort was destroyed by the British prior to 1812 when they moved their encampment to Mackinac Island and built the larger fort there.)

After this we had lunch in the park overlooking the Big Mac bridge and then headed off to Mill Creek for a tour and the adventure trail. But reroute, we crossed the bridge and stopped briefly in St Ignace just to give the kids the change to say they'd crossed the bridge. (Many had never been in this area before.)



At Mill Creek we were treated to an interesting presentation describing how 2-man pit sawing was done, and how the early water powered saw mill drastically reduced the labor needed to make boards. They have rebuild a replica saw mill which is fully operational and they cranked it up so we could see (and hear) it working.



Pit saw demonstration with camp staffer Brittany as the pit-saw volunteer.

After that we headed to the adventure tour. Everyone had to be strapped up and first took a hike across a narrow cable suspended walkway which led to the zip line. Everyone seemed to enjoy the ride down the zip-line and after that it was a climb up as much of a 50 foot artificial rock wall as could be mustered. Campers and staffers were all treated to this. Many made it to the top, and all made a good effort.



Abby and Amy with Kat on the wall – Khan and Yang on the wall.



Getting ready to head down the zip line, and taking the plunge!

After this it was off for dinner at Anna's Buffet in Mackinaw City where the group was treated to an all you can eat buffet dinner. Needless to say, after 9 days on the trip, this was a very popular dinner. Afterward it was back to Charlevoix and off to bed to get ready for the climax of the trip – parasailing on Lake Charlevoix.



Dinner at Anna's in Mackinaw City – all you can eat buffet! (Abby & Leah hamming it up.)

Day 10 – Tuesday July 20th – 4th day at Charlevoix

We met at 8:15 AM to head off to Boyne Parasailing's shop in Boyne City. The kids and staffers had all been looking forward to the parasailing with great anticipation, as none of them had ever done that before. We carefully organized groups of 3 (the limit of the canopy they use) to include a sighted person in each group so that they could describe the view to those that couldn't see it. Each group was also to get a stimulating "toe dip" into the lake which was fun for all whether they can see the water or only feel it. After we headed out onto the boat we got the first group off and they loved it. But the wind had been picking up and that was making things difficult for the event. On the 2nd group they cut back to 2 people (vs 3) and they still struggled with the winds.



The Boyne Parasail boat and the first crew getting ready to soar! (Jordan, Abby & Halen)



Away they go with spirits and bodies soaring! 2nd group getting a toe dip. (Austin & Ahmed)

They made one last try to find a spot on the lake that might be more isolated but they couldn't (strong winds were blowing causing small craft warnings on Lake Michigan) so unfortunately with only 5 of the 22 making the ride into the sky, the parasailing had to be called off. We called them a couple of times later that day with the wind didn't let up so the rest of the parasailing was scrubbed. That was disappointing for sure, but to make up for it we went back out in my speed boat and took any who wanted to for some more tubing. We got everyone that wanted one a ride, but again we had to cut that activity short as some ominously dark clouds were approaching so we headed in and got everyone out of the water and battened down the hatches. The storm passed as by, but so we spent the rest of the afternoon lounging around either at Cedar Lane or back at the campground at Whiting. Then we headed off for our final dinner to the Mountainside Grille near Boyne Mountain for a dinner of ever-popular pizza.]

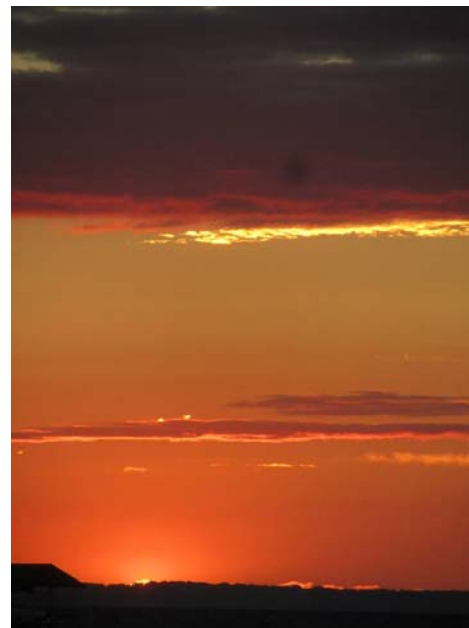


The kids and staff enjoying the ever popular pizza dinner at the Mountainside Grille.

After that we headed back to the Wolfe property at Cedar Lane and had a final campfire which included staff recognition for the OUB Staff that had been working at the various camps for the past 2 months. Then it was our final good-byes to everyone for Renee and I and the group headed off to the campground at Whiting park for their final night together.



The group around the camp fire at Cedar Lane with Donavon on the guitar strumming tunes.



The final adventure camp campfire as the sun set on Charlevoix for the last night of camp.

Day 11 – Wednesday July 21st – heading home!

There was nothing planned for Wednesday except packing up and hitting the road. With kids that needed to be dropped off at a number of location in Sothern Michigan, it was going to be a long day as it was. The gang stopped for a final meal together at a KFC along the way home and then everyone was reunited back with their parents after 12 days of Adventure.

Renee and I spend the day cleaning up everything at our place on Cedar Lane and packed up and also headed for home. It had been a concerted effort on my part to organize the entire camp, and host it for the time spent at Charlevoix. It stretched my limits and those of our facilities at our property, but with the support of a portipotty to augment the bathroom facilities, some rented chairs and a neighbor that let us use part of their lawn and their fire pit (thanks Glenn!), it all worked out very well. We were sad to see the large and lively group leave, but it had been a great (and tiring) experience for all. Mission accomplished!

Thanks to all of my supporters!

Thanks for taking the time to read this – I hope you are inspired by the trip. Everything wasn't perfect, but things went very well and the kids had the time of their life and the staff all had a lot fun as well. I also hope you understand how much planning and effort went into organizing and running the camp. It was a huge effort on everyone's part to get it all organized and funded and completed (with the help of OUB and their staff), but it worked out very well. The camp was hectic as shepherding lots of blind people around always is, but was fun and very gratifying. We will very likely plan another Running Blind adventure camp of some sort for next summer, likely in a new location – so stay tuned for that! Feel free to send me a note if you'd like with comments or questions. Thanks again for your support and I hope enjoy the rest of the summer.

Hal Wolfe
Running Blind President and Founder
www.runningblind.org



More Adventure Camp pictures. (I wish I could include them all!)







It was a fantastic experience and I miss all of my new friends from Adventure Camp! - Hal