

## Unificationist Scouts Backpack in the Wilderness

Jim Boothby and Ariana Moon  
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*During day one of the Dolly Sods Winter Mountaineering Trip, senior patrol leader John Abendroth crests the escarpment near Bear Rocks.*

Boy Scout Troop 1212, sponsored by New Hope Academy in Landover Hills, Maryland recently returned from its annual winter trip to the Dolly Sods wilderness park in West Virginia with stories to tell. The two-day campout in deep snow, which consisted of not-your-everyday tasks of navigating through West Virginia's wilderness with only a compass, sleeping in the middle of a snowstorm and following a path with only 100-feet of visibility, began on the morning of February 15, 2013 and concluded the following day.

According to longtime scoutmaster Jim Boothby, the remote, wind-swept, high-mountain plateau of Dolly Sods "delivered the goods." Throughout the weekend of the trip, an additional 14 inches of snow fell on top of a base of several feet, and temperatures hovered at around four degrees. Some hardier scouts slept out under the stars without tents and found themselves further buried by more overnight snow fall. With an annual snowfall of about 15 feet and sweeping above tree-line vistas, the Dolly Sods is the only place south of New England similar to the conditions of the Canadian tundra and extreme northern boreal forests, according to Boothby.



*The Dolly Sods sits on a 4,000 feet plateau in the Allegheny Highlands near the Eastern Continental Divide and has the largest virgin stands of Red Spruce in the eastern United States.*

"The challenge of imbuing young men with character and confidence continues to drive our scout troop to extremes," said Boothby. "Realistic leadership training for second-generation Unificationist boys in their teenage years is what these outdoor experiences are about. The boys joke tongue in cheek that the reason the Dolly Sods winter expedition is only once a year is that it takes about that long to forget how tough it was. But of course, they love it! They love all the more challenging extreme trips we do. Bringing out or building character requires stress and pushing oneself a bit. The big surf beach trips, the longer canoe trips, the sailing adventures and the bike hikes – anything where they test themselves is going to be a hit."

"I still find myself in awe at the raw power of the wilderness," said John Abendroth, 16, who holds the highest leadership position of the scouts as the senior patrol leader. "I still find more beauty in a snowy mountaintop at dusk than in most other places. I still push myself to my limits, only now it's because I choose to."

He continued, "On my first trip, I remember being miserable. I got into my tent as fast as I could, and I just couldn't get my frozen feet to warm up. I had a panic attack, and thought I was getting frost bite. I

remember one of the older scouts, my brother James, coming into the tent, and putting my frozen feet into his jacket against his warm belly. Then, another older scout brought me a freshly-cooked, hot meatball sub and gave it to me in my tent. I was too weak to carry my pack, so my patrol leader carried it. My feet were soaked, so an older guy gave me dry socks and dried my boots over the fire. The amount of love and care I received made that trip one of my greatest experiences ever.



*In near-whiteout conditions, a lone scout struggles to keep up as he endures 30-40 mph winds and 10 above zero temperatures.*

“Six years later, I find myself sitting in a tent with a pair of icy feet in my jacket, telling a young guy that we wouldn't let anything happen to him. One of our youngest scouts had a panic attack and was hyperventilating. It was the caring words of a dedicated leader and a warm belly that calmed him down. With our encouragement, he hiked out on his own strength. I couldn't have been prouder. Over time, I had not only become more physically capable, but also grown up to *become* what it was that had made troop 1212 so amazing when I was younger.”



*Having graduated seven 17-year-old Eagle Scouts last year, Troop 1212 is rebuilding with many new 11- and 12-year-old scouts like Koyo Fujioka, shown here with a wind-swept and snow-covered face.*

Nineteen scouts, four former scouts and two dads transited the plateau, navigating across the open ridges and camping in the relatively protected red-spruce ringed Red Creek area.



*An early morning sun rises over a four degree Fahrenheit campfire as boys, young adults and dads wake up after spending the night in 0-degree sleeping bags.*

“Recently we had to put chains on the van just to get into this place. A couple of the vehicles seem to always struggle getting in and out, but we love that too,” said Abendroth. “On day two, the wind was tossing the snow all around, almost painting a design on the frozen landscape. From this trail, we reached a snowed-over fire road. The top of this road was one of the most intense parts of the trip. The wind was

so powerful that one of our younger guys actually got lifted into the air. As we hiked to this point, the snow was so thick and the wind so powerful that visibility dropped to about 100 feet. The intense wind was leaving icicles in mustaches. It reminded me of the song 'Real Man' and the line 'We see smiles in faces behind, their windswept frozen beards.' On the way home, we stopped at Pizza Hut to have a troop-wide celebratory meal."



*The troop's high adventure trips are possible because of the active support of former scouts such as Karl Selle, 27, a wilderness survival expert, shown here barring his teeth against the blizzard.*

"For young Unificationist guys on the East Coast, this annual trip has become a legendary outing," said acting Scoutmaster and Eagle Scout Jake Mas, 22, of Maryland. "The boys are so pumped about this expedition every year, and the snowier and stormier, the better. It's a really beautiful and remote area. There's nothing like the Dolly Sods."

Even teen boys who had seldom seen snow made the expedition. Raised in Africa and recently in America, second-year scout Karaoke Urban, 16, said, "This year I had more courage to handle the deep snow, because last year it was a bit intimidating. Fighting our way through the Spruce trees and making our path through the deep snow was amazing."

First-year scout Koyo Fujioka said, "I thought it was going to be an easy trip. Boy, was I wrong! I learned I should have been more prepared, even though my patrol leader told me exactly how to prepare. After this trip, I feel I can handle anything."

"The youngest guys were so excited about what they had just accomplished and the things they had experienced," said Abendroth. "They couldn't stop talking about how cool and awesome it was that they had camped in weather so far below freezing with all that snow. The greatest thing was hearing one of them say, 'I can't wait until next year!'"

*Troop 1212 was founded by Jim Boothby and a handful of Maryland Unificationists in 1999. For more information on the trip planning of Troop 1212, contact Jim Boothby*