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Boy Scouts Find New Home Amid Mountains

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All Things Considered



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The Boy Scouts of America are transforming 10,000 acres of mountainous land into a year-round high-adventure camp in West Virginia.

Noah Adams/NPR

In West Virginia, an Appalachian mountain is being transformed into a vast Boy Scout camp. It's more than 10,000 acres and will cost the Boy Scouts of America more than \$400 million to be turned into The Summit Bechtel Reserve, also known simply as the Summit.

The year-round high-adventure camp will soon be the permanent home of the National Scout Jamboree — the next one is in 2013 — and will host the 2019 World Jamboree. The BSA announced Thursday that it has received \$85 million in new gifts to help the effort.

The best way to view progress on the construction is to see it from aboveground: a mostly wooded and mountainous site being converted into what looks like golf courses. But it's a carved-out Boy Scout camp, waiting for grass to seed.

"It took us about six minutes here to make a circle all the way around here and we're doing about 80 miles an hour; it's really something," Chris Kappler said from his open cockpit biplane. Kappler is a pilot and owner of the [Wild Blue Adventure](#) company, which provides aerial tours of the area.

The BSA has other adventure camps, but this is the big new idea. In addition to the jamborees, the scout troops can come here year-round for whitewater rafting, mountain climbing and winter camping.

The scouts looked at 80 possible locations before settling on West Virginia. A day's drive from a lot of cities, the site had a large tract of mountain land with a for sale sign on it.

"It's awfully hard to find a place as virgin as this," Jim Small, a local kayaker said. "The area here is one of the best-kept secrets in the country."

The New River runs through a deep gorge, protected by the National Park Service, and tourism is the driving industry. In the town of Fayetteville, Maura Kistler is the co-owner of Water Stone, a store that sells sleeping bags and climbing gear. She's hoping for a Boy Scout cash register effect.

"We've been in business 17, 18 years — [and] we had our best month ever in July," Kistler said. "All I know is we're beefing up our Boy Scout section."

[The 2013 Jamboree](#) is already almost happening on the Internet. Daily blogs keep Boy Scouts all over the country in touch and excited about the new site. The BSA hired Weld, a local social media marketing company, to create videos and the blogs. Weld's George Rogers says the company's hypothetical core customer is the digital Boy Scout.

"Our 13-year-old scout has been a digital native his entire life; he's used to acquiring photos with his phone — even acquiring videos — geotagging those photos and even sharing his precise location at any given time. In the social media landscape is really where the conversation is going to happen with the core customer," Rogers said.

In this part of southern West Virginia people know the new Boy Scout land as Garden Ground Mountain. It rises high over the town of Mount Hope, which was busy back in the coal mining days.

Kirk Harman, who runs Mountain State What-Nots, an antiques and collectibles store, said the Boy Scouts have already had an impact.

The Boy Scout Story

William D. Boyce, a Chicago publisher, lost his way in a dense London fog in 1909. When a boy approached and helped guide him, Boyce offered a tip but the boy refused, explaining that he would not take a tip for doing a "good turn."

This gesture by an unknown scout led Boyce to meet with Robert Baden-Powell, who inspired the scouting movement in Britain with the publication of his book, *Aids to Scouting*, in 1903. When Baden-Powell saw that young boys were reading his book, he rewrote it as a nonmilitary nature skills manual called *Scouting for Boys* in 1908 and conducted a successful camp-out with 22 boys at Brownsea Island, off the coast of England.

As a result of his meeting with Baden-Powell — who was later proclaimed "Chief Scout of the World" — Boyce incorporated the Boy Scouts of America on Feb. 8, 1910.

In 1913, Boy Scouts controlled the crowds at the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson. Scouts have served at every inauguration since in some ceremonial role. Today, scouts are one of the largest youth organizations in the U.S., with more than 2 1/2 million members between the ages of 7 and 21.

Key Moments In The BSA History

- 1910: Boy Scouts of America is incorporated
- 1916: Federal charter gives BSA the exclusive right to use emblems, badges and words or phrases
- 1925: Membership exceeds 1 million
- 1927: Inter-Racial Service created to promote scouting in African-American, Native American, Hispanic and Japanese communities
- 1930: Cub Scout program begins for younger boys
- 1933: 1.8 million items are collected to aid victims of the Great Depression
- 1941: After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, scouts in Hawaii set up first-aid stations and kitchens and man 58 air sirens around Honolulu
- 1960: John F. Kennedy is the first former scout to become president of the U.S.
- 1970: Project SOAR — Save Our American Resources — prompts tens of thousands of scouting units to recycle, clean up litter and plant trees
- 1980: A new Boy Scout uniform designed by Oscar de la Renta is introduced; it is used until 2008

- 1993: The BSA helps the former Soviet Union produce its first scout handbook since the 1917 Russian Revolution ended scouting
- 1998: BSA adopts Leave No Trace guidelines to protect the environment while outside
- 2009: BSA issues the 12th edition of the *The Boy Scout Handbook*, with an interactive iPhone application

— Tasnim Shamma, NPR

Source: *Boy Scouts of America*



Around the Nation
A Trip With Three Scouts



Aerial shot of the future site of a Boy Scout camp in West Virginia.

Noah Adams/NPR

"It's a quiet little town. We got new sidewalks and I guess that's the result of some of the Boy Scouts, new lights," Harman said. "And we got one fast-food restaurant and that's across the street. If you have about an hour and a half you can probably get served if it's rush hour."

The rush hour is at lunchtime in Mount Hope. And more customers will show up when the state starts on some Summit-related highway projects, including an access road to the main gate. West Virginia will spend \$10 million on roads, most of it federal money. The Summit also gets state funds to clean up some abandoned coal mines on the property.

Initial funding of \$50 million for The Summit Bechtel Reserve came from former Eagle Scout Stephen Bechtel of the Bechtel Corp., an engineering and construction firm.

Mike Patrick, the chief operating officer of The Summit Bechtel Reserve, says the Summit will become the second-largest city in the state of West Virginia for a few weeks during the Jamboree in July 2013. He said the scouts are building facilities to accommodate 40,000 scouts and 8,000 to 9,000 volunteers.

The unemployment rate here reaches close to 10 percent, and this project brings welcome jobs. There are 285 full-time employees building the Summit camp; 80 percent of them are West Virginians.

Gary Hartley, director of community and government relations for the Summit, says he can imagine it finished. He says he sees all the tent villages, the shower houses, the lake for canoes and kayaks, the zip lines, the mountain bike course, the BMX-ers, the rock climbers, the skateboarders, the arena designed for ceremonies and music and 80,000 people, on July 15, 2013.