



opinions

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Stop the Boy Scouts

Boy Scouts of America wants to move a 40-k person campout to the area around Goshen. Bad idea.

By Cody Beauchamp
OPINIONS EDITOR

Before I write anything else, I should say that I am now and always will be a proud Boy Scout.

My father is an Eagle Scout, the highest rank any Boy Scout can achieve. I am also a proud Eagle Scout, as is my little brother.

Between the three of us, we have spent literally thousands of nights camping, hiked hundreds of miles and spent years being active in the Scouts.

Between the three of us, we have also attended six Boy Scout National Jamborees – my father in 1973, 2001, and 2005. I went with him in 2001, and my brother joined both of us in 2005.

So, to put it simply, Scouting and attending the quadrennial Scout Jamborees run deep in my family.

The two Jamborees I attended were, without doubt, highlights of my time as a Scout, surpassed only by those last few months when I finally earned my Eagle Scout rank.

Why am I saying all this? Because I feel the need to establish some credibility before I write the following – the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is about to make a horrible decision concerning their Jamborees.

In case you have no idea what a Jamboree is, other than a funny, dorky sounding word, allow me to fill you in.

Every four years since 1937, the Boy Scouts of America have held a giant gathering and campout for thousands of Scouts. And when I say giant, I mean giant.

The last Jamboree was held in 2005 on the grounds of Ft. A.P. Hill, near Bowling Green, Va.

The official attendance count from the BSA is 37,500 Scouts and Scouters (meaning, usually, fathers who are adult leaders).

But I suspect that number does not include the thousands of staffers for that Jamboree, who did everything from teach merit badges to run what was essentially a temporary city.

Imagine if you will a tent city that springs up basically overnight – roughly 40,000 people, all camping on the same few hundred acres, all staying there for about two weeks.

The Jamboree is essentially a fully developed city. Each one has a hospital and clinic system which can treat everything from a 14 year-old with a hiking blister to a 50 year-old adult leader going in cardiac arrest.

Each one has a police force. No kidding. There is also a public transportation system, a network of buses that transports thousands of Scouts over hundreds of miles of routes from one end of the camp to the other, every day.

What's amazing is that, in my experience, the buses were more reliable than, say, the London Tube or the DC Metro ever have been.

There are fire stations with fully operational engines – not just Scouts forming bucket chains.

There are sanitation systems that run dozens of garbage trucks that have to deal with tons of waste everyday.

There are temporary telephone networks. There are temporary radio stations and newspapers. There is a catering staff that has to feed thousands of staffers, in dozens of mess halls.

There is an opening and a closing arena show for the entire Jamboree that employs dozens of professional bands and acts, and the closing show's fireworks display is one of the best I've ever seen.

It is a huge deal, and here's what's troubling – for its 2013 Jamboree, the BSA wants to move the event to their Goshen Scout Reservation here in Rockbridge County.

Right now, this is the single most ludicrous idea I've ever heard. The Boy Scouts want to hold a massive multi-week camp that requires extremely complex logistics at a camp in the Goshen area.

Have you been to Goshen lately? That area cannot support the National Jamboree as it is.

Most of the roads in that area of Rockbridge County are one-lane each way. They are poor quality on top of that, with tons of blind corners and almost no shoulders. There are steep cliffs next to most of the roads, falling off into the Maury.

Are you telling me that the thousands of

shuttles that will transport roughly 40,000 Scouts to the Jamboree site can safely use those roads? What about the hundreds of delivery trucks that will have to make daily trips to transport tons of food? What about the other hundreds of trucks hauling off 40,000 people's tons of waste?

Or think about the electric aspect of things. Even though Scouts camp without electricity in their sites, there are hundreds of apsets of a Jamboree that require an electric grid.

The tons of food distributed on a daily basis have to be refrigerated. The multiple fully functioning hospitals and clinics have to have power, as do the computers in the command tents that coordinate the buses, sanitation crews, security, etc.

And those are just the few things I can think of off the top of my head. There are

environment. Take it from me, someone who has spent hundreds of nights camping in all kinds of terrain and conditions.

It is impossible to truly camp without leaving some kind of trace, some kind of footprint. It is just as impossible for 40,000 people to camp without significantly changing that area.

Right now that's not a problem the Jamboree has – it's located on a military base.

The military exercises and training activities that makes up Fort A.P. Hill's non-Jamboree schedule impact the environment far more than the Jamboree does.

But it's different for Goshen. Drop 40,000 people down there for a week, and the area will never look the same afterwards.

If this happens, the last W&L students who will be able to enjoy beautiful, unique

Most W&L students are only passing through Rockbridge [Co.]. But...we enjoy Goshen and the Maury as much as any native. We, like the permanent residents of this county, love and benefit from this wonderful area of the river...We have a duty to make sure this beautiful little area isn't destroyed.

doubtless hundreds of other areas that require electricity – are you telling me the utilities network in the Rockbridge County countryside can handle that kind of demand as is? Not a chance.

And then there's the massive overhaul for the water networks in the area – 40,000 people showering, cooking and cleaning every day requires a lot of water.

My point is this – right now, the area and towns around Goshen do not have the infrastructure to handle the National Jamboree.

Unlike its current location – the Army base at Fort A.P. Hill – the logistical demands of getting 40,000 people in the same area cannot be met by our neck of the woods.

This is precisely why this is a bad idea, both for the Scouts and more importantly for anyone who cares about the Goshen area or Rockbridge County.

A group protesting the Boy Scouts' decision – the Friends of the Maury – has pointed out, quite correctly, that most of the costs for overhauling the Goshen area will be shouldered by Virginians and more specifically the good people of Rockbridge County.

We as W&L students don't really have to worry about that aspect of this whole ordeal. Except for the few of us who are Rockbridge born-and-bred (which I'm not), our tax dollars won't be going to pay for anything.

But just because we aren't going to feel the effects of the Jamboree in our taxes doesn't mean we won't be affected.

Most W&L students are only passing through Rockbridge. But for the four years we're here, we enjoy Goshen and the Maury as much as any native. We, like the permanent residents of this county, love and benefit from this wonderful area of the river.

If we fail to voice our displeasure with the BSA's decision, we might be the last generation of students that are truly able to enjoy Goshen.

The reason is because the type of extreme overhaul the Jamboree will require will almost certainly destroy Goshen as we know it. This part of the Maury will be irreparably changed. I'd bet my Eagle badge on it.

There is no way on God's green earth that you can infuse 40,000 people into the Rockbridge County countryside without millions of dollars worth of new and improved roads. These roads will take up more space, and I don't see any way they can be constructed without severely damaging the fragile ecosystem around here.

There's also no way you can convince me that having 40,000 teenagers suddenly living so close to the Maury won't ruin it. Boy Scouts aim to be environmentally friendly, yes, but the thing about being a Scout is that it's a learning process.

Even the best Boy Scouts don't camp without leaving some kind of trace, without in some small way placing stress upon the

Goshen will be the students here spring 2013. After that, it will never be the same.

So what can we do? How in the heck do you attack the Boy Scouts without looking completely ridiculous? They're *Boy Scouts* for crying out loud!

The problem isn't the Scouts – like I've said, it's a phenomenal experience, and an organization I'm proud to have been in.

The problem is, rather, the location. The BSA simply didn't pick a good one.

Luckily, there is still time for all of us and all of the residents of Rockbridge County to let them know that.

I'm willing to bet that if the considerable brain power W&L has housed in its ecology, environmental studies, and other science classes turned their attention towards explaining to the public and the Scouts what is negative about this decision, it would have an impact.

I'm willing to bet that if those brilliant law students interested in helping the local communities through free clinics lent their talents toward helping the seemingly inevitable lawsuit against the Scouts, it would have an impact.

I'm willing to bet that if the many lawmakers and politicians to whom we as a student body are connected suddenly noticed that this issue needs further public debate, it would have an impact.

I'm especially willing to bet that if enough students joined the Friends of the Maury, we could do a lot to help them save and protect this beautiful area from a well-intentioned but sure-to-be-bad decision.

So check it out. Give www.savegoshenpass.com a look. Go to the public information meetings they're having. If you're a Boy Scout, or an Eagle Scout, join me in letting the Scouts know Goshen is a horrible site for the Jamboree.

I'm sure I'm not the only person at W&L who went to a Jamboree and realizes what kind of strain that would put on Goshen.

I'm sure I'm not the only person who thinks that before they start significantly changing our beloved countryside, the Scouts needs to defend its decisions.

Unless my personal plans radically change, I won't even be living in Virginia in 2013. My Goshen days will be long gone.

Doesn't matter, for me or for any of us. We have a duty to make sure this beautiful little area isn't destroyed. We have to become interested in this debate.

We have to help our neighbors protect the Maury and Goshen before we graduate, because we love it and benefit from it as much as they do.

We have to be interested in protecting Goshen now, or it may not be there when we come back as alumni.

Now that would be a tragedy.

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