

2002 Venture Trip

June 21 – 30

Laguna Station, South Padre Island, Texas

Troop 275 – Ames, Iowa

2002 Venture Crew Photo:



Back L to R: 1) Mark Voss, 2) Arron Jacobson-Swanson, 3) Dan Voss, 4) Joey Lien,
5) Joel Hendrickson, 6) Tom Meyer

Front L to R: 7) Seth Jacobson-Swanson, 8) Luke Houghton, 9) Cameron Osborn

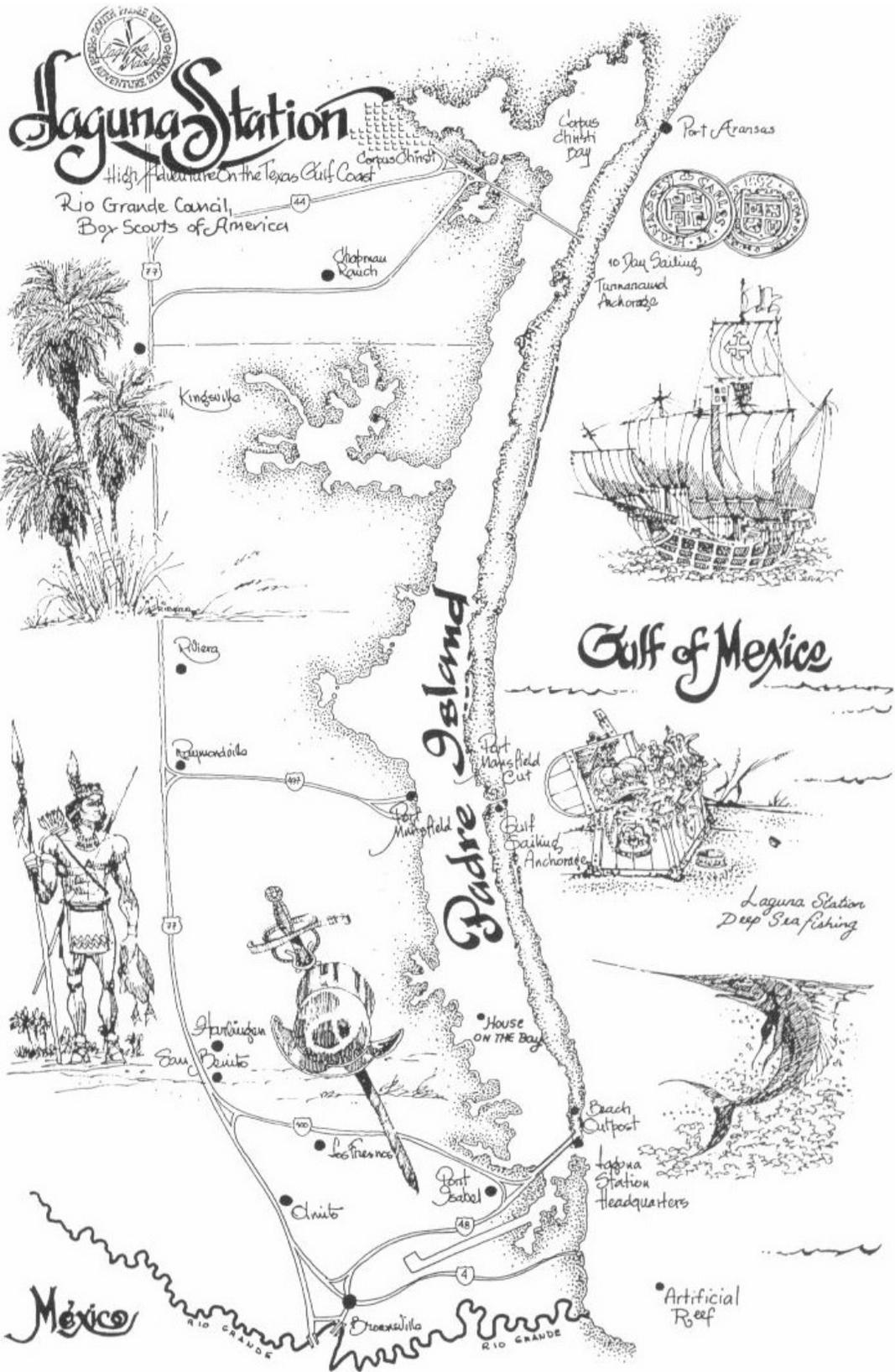
2002 Venture Crew T-shirt:



2002 Venture Crew Patch:



2002 Map(s):





2002 Venture Crew Journal

Troop 275 Venture Trip
Laguna Madre, South Padre Island, TX
June 21-30, 2002

Day 1: Friday, June 21

Quote of the day: "This TV doesn't work".

Everyone met at Tom's at 8 AM. After getting organized and running a few errands, we got on the road by 8:45 AM. We headed south on I-35 and just before the Missouri border we were all ready for a rest stop. The rest area proved to be quite a side trip, as we drove several miles along a serpentine road to get to it. Just north of Kansas City, MO we stopped at a McDonald's for lunch. We had a real adventure trying to follow I-35 through downtown Kansas City – the video game 'Pole Position' has nothing on I-35 when it comes to sudden twists and turns.

Speaking of video entertainment, Grant was kind enough to provide a TV, VCR, and X-box that could run on the car's power. But there was a flakey connection, so the X-box worked, but the TV didn't.

Our mid-afternoon rest stop was at the last oasis on the Kansas turnpike. They have greatly reduced the number of restaurants on the turnpike, so the choice was limited, to say the least.

We arrived at the Woodland Camper Park, near Tokana, OK, about 5:15 PM. This campground was pretty basic – just an open field with RV hookups. We were given a grassy area near some trees to pitch our tents. For recreation, there was a gas station and mini-mart nearby. Supper was canned ravioli and Spaghetti-O's supplemented by many trips to the gas station.

Miles driven for the day: 480.

Day 2: Saturday, June 22

We were up by 6:00 AM and on the road by 7:30. Lunch was near Fort Worth, TX. We first tried a Subway, but since the neighborhood did not look too good we drove about half a mile to a Wendy's.

All the way from Austin to our campground at New Baunfels, there was heavy traffic, construction, and old rough freeway. We pulled into the Hill Country RV park around 5 PM. This was a much nicer place than where we stayed last night and we all enjoyed the indoor pool, hot tub, and shuffleboard court.

Miles driven for the day: 522.

Day 3: Sunday, June 23

We noticed the sunrise getting later as we get farther south. At 6:30 AM it was not as light today as it was yesterday. We were on the road by 7:30,



heading towards Corpus Christi. Near San Antonio we passed a significant accident on the other side of the interstate - a reminder to us to stay alert. We had lunch at Wendy's in Harlingen, TX, only about 36 miles from South Padre. We were excited to get our first view of the lagoon and the causeway to South Padre. About 1:30 PM we arrived at Laguna Station and learned that they are not taking check-ins until 2:00. We picked out some tents and moved in while we waited. The camp is part of

Isla Blanca County Park, which the scouts lease for the summer. Accommodations are basic canvas tents with the usual camp cots inside. There are two people per tent. The only permanent structures are a bath house, with separate sides for scouts and adults, a covered pavilion at the breezy southern-most tip of the island for meals, and a small clubhouse area which serves as office, trading post, infirmary, and quartermaster area. A nearby oyster bar is off-limits to us.

Around 2:30 John McIntyre, the camp director, showed up and we checked in. The first order of business was to do the swim test. All of us passed except Joey, who made a strong try. Since we had the rest of the afternoon available, we went to the public beach on the ocean (eastward) side of the island. Because it was Sunday, the beach was crowded but we all enjoyed splashing and playing in the surf. The water temperature was nearly perfect.

About 5:30 PM, we headed back for showers and to prepare for supper. The evening was an opening "campfire" – without a fire – where we were introduced to the staff. The four younger scouts and two leaders were in Island Adventure Crew B, the three older scouts were assigned to SCUBA Team 1. The "mate" for Crew B was a very friendly young lady named Bea, who was an instant hit with the scouts. The SCUBA crew has John McIntyre for their leader. For the adults, the evening ends with a leaders' meeting. Quiet time began at 10:00 PM and lights out was at 11.



Miles for the day: 323.

Total Miles Ames to South Padre: 1325.

Day 4: Monday, June 24

Quote of the day: "I've been in salt water so much today, I feel like a pickle". - Tom

We started our first full day at camp by rising at about 7:30 and after flag raising, we joined the line for breakfast. Meals are prepared by Jake's, a local restaurant, and are brought in since there are no kitchen facilities on-site. The food was quite good, and there were very few complaints. The meals were served in the open air pavilion on the extreme southern tip of the island, which provided a good breeze but resulted in a few meals blown into people's laps. On hot, humid days the breeze felt great.



For the Island Adventure people, the morning was spent sea kayaking just off the boating beach on the laguna side of camp. Everyone had a good time and got the hang of it pretty quickly.

The SCUBA guys spent the morning "blowing bubbles" in a local swimming pool John McIntyre had access to. This was a session to get acquainted with the gear and to start learning how to use it safely.

We all came together for lunch back at camp and then went our separate ways again, as we would do most days. The Island Adventure crew was to take a "sea dog" to a beach area we could see just across the channel next to our dining pavilion, but the earliest reservations we could get were for 4 PM. We decided playing volleyball didn't appeal to us, so we headed back to the public beach to try to tame the waves.

At 4 PM we walked the few hundred yards to a business where we caught the sea dog and crossed the channel. A sea dog is an amphibious vehicle as shown in the accompanying picture. On the way over the driver let both Daniel and Joey have a turn steering it. On the other side, we pulled up on the beach, past some temporary vacation homes and on to a beach facing the gulf side. The area we were at was still in Texas, but to get there from camp one would have to drive to Brownsville and



back, more than a one hundred-mile drive. The beach where we landed was heavily littered, but when we got around to the gulf beach it was beautiful. The waves were great – better than they had been at

the public beach just across the channel to the north – and we frolicked until we were exhausted. This crew really liked to play in the surf!

While the Island Adventurers were having all this fun, the SCUBA crew was holed up for most of the afternoon in the pavilion doing introductory book work. After finishing their assignments, they took off for the beach and a cookout, so they were not in camp for supper.



In the evening, those of us still in camp went on the “Island Tour”, which usually is a tour of the tourist shops in town. We stopped at the “Surf Shop” for a while and then the overwhelming sentiment in the camp van was to hit the Dairy Queen. We enjoyed our treats while watching a bungee-jumping business across the street. The normal bungee jumping from a tower we estimated to be 120 feet high was bad enough, but they also had a small box that held two people that was tied to two bungee

cords. They would pull it down, stretching the bungees and then release it. The box would shoot high into the air, well above the 120 foot towers, tumbling around the whole time. It was a lot of fun to watch; we weren’t sure about how much fun it would be to try, though.

Day 5: Tuesday, June 25

The Island Adventure crew spent the morning on eco-activities. It started with a tour of the University of Texas Pan American Coastal Studies Laboratory, which was in the park, close to camp. The main part was a marine museum with displays of shells, stuffed sea-life, and tanks with live critters. We spent about 30 minutes browsing the exhibits and then went into a small auditorium to watch a video. It was a classic example of how not to make a documentary. Too much material, inconsistent level of treatment (at times aiming it at a 10 year-old level at others getting into technical jargon), and a generally insipid commentary were the source of most of the problems. And it went on and on for forty-five minutes or more. By the end most of us were asleep.



After waking up, we got in the van and drove to the “turtle lady”. This is a save-the-sea-turtles grass roots organization founded by a lady named Ila Loetscher, who started it while in her fifties after the death of her husband. She was a remarkable woman and remained active well into her nineties. She

was a native of Pella, Iowa and her niece was one of the guides when we visited. The niece still returns



to Pella for family reunions. Ila was the first woman in Iowa to have a pilot's license and was a friend of Amelia Earheart. The foundation, "Sea Turtle, Inc." is devoted to saving all seven species of sea turtles – all of which are threatened, mainly by destruction of habitat and nesting area. Unfortunately, because of the time we spent watching the video we missed the only turtle presentation of the day and had to content ourselves with viewing the exhibits and visiting the small gift

shop.

It was back to the classroom for the SCUBA crew in the morning.

After lunch the Island Adventurers went to Mexico.



Even though the border is only a few miles from S. Padre, we drove for 1 ½ hours to reach the more

suitable town of Progreso. We parked the camp vans on the American side and paid a toll of twenty-five cents to cross a bridge over the Rio Grande. On the other side we found a town with a main shopping area of about four blocks lined with tourist shops. There was an arcade overhanging the sidewalk for most of the way, and the shade it offered was a welcome relief from the hot sun. Even more welcome were those few stores that were air conditioned. Several of the stores were quite large and some true bargains were to be found, along with a lot of junk. Several scouts bought \$15 "Rolex" watches and "Oakley" sunglasses. Mexican vanilla is supposed to be very good and it was very cheap so Tom bought what will probably be a lifetime supply. In addition to the stores we noticed a lot of orthodontist offices on the second floor of the buildings. But none of the scouts were eager to come here for braces. I'm sure the price would be quite low. After shopping and seeing the town for about an hour and a half we were ready to call it a day, so we crossed back over the bridge, with scarcely a grunt from the US Border officials, and drove back to camp.

The SCUBA crew went to a local area called Parrot Eyes, from which they were ferried out to a platform in the lagoon. Once there, three crews alternated between snorkeling and SCUBA diving.

Our evening activity was to go night snorkeling. For this we were driven to Parrot Eyes resort and were ferried from there out to a raft in the Laguna Madre. Several of the scouts saw a sting ray, and we all saw many small fish and a few big ones, too. The photoplankton that had impressed Tom three years ago was almost non-existent, though a few scouts saw a bit of it.

Day 6: Wednesday, June 26

Quote of the day: "I am not a dolphin!" – proposed T-shirt for Daniel

The morning activity for the Island Adventurers was to go sailing. We first had an instructional session on shore, but it was sketchy and pretty confusing. At our disposal, we had two sunfish boats and one dolphin boat. The winds were pretty strong from the southeast and everyone got a chance to be at the helm.



The SCUBA guys went back out to Parrot Eyes for more water time.

In the afternoon, we tried our skills at wind surfing. "Little Brad" (one of the staff) did a much better job of explaining than we had had for sailing in the morning. He was very patient with us, and it was necessary since everyone fell off at first. Some got the hang of it after a while and we all could



see how it could become a favorite activity. Some of the scouts had a chance to do some more sailing, which led to a bit of amusement. Daniel and Zack (from the other group in our crew) took a sunfish out. Because of the fairly strong wind they eventually capsized. We had been told what to do, and they followed the instructions just fine. But the instructor had forgotten to tell us the "first turn the bow into the wind" part. So Daniel stood on the centerboard and they got the boat half-righted when the wind would catch the sail and take it back over again. This happened several times, causing one of the dolphin sightseeing boats to pull up, providing an interested, camera-snapping audience for the procedure. Eventually – far later than he should have – the staff member came out on a jet ski and talked them through the process.

The afternoon saw more book work for the SCUBA crew.

Day 7: Thursday, June 27

Quote of the day: "Happy Birthday, Grant!" – All

The morning activities were cancelled by a bodacious storm that came in. Looking from our campsite



north to the town of South Padre we saw a lightning strike followed by an orange glow on the horizon. The morning activity for the Island Adventurers was to have been surf kayaking. The entire camp assembled in the quartermaster area and they put on a video of "The Fifth Element". The nine of us chose to go into town instead, in part so we could wash our troop T-shirts for the trip home. In town we saw that electricity was out on the west side of the street and when we passed the remains of the power substation we saw why – that was

the fire we had seen on the horizon. It continued to rain hard the whole time we were in town and the gutters filled up quickly. We put our clothes into the machines at Jake's Laundromat (the same Jake of Jake's restaurant that caters our meals at camp). As we came out it started raining even harder. Traffic was pretty much restricted to straddling the middle of the five lanes, and even there the water was about three inches deep. We hit three T-shirt/souvenir shops and a supermarket before picking up our laundry and heading back to camp. Turning into the supermarket, we went up to the headlights in water.



Lunch was in the quartermaster area and afterwards our crew went out to the gazebo with Bea to celebrate Grant's birthday with a chocolate cake we picked up at the supermarket. During lunch the rain lightened, and by the time we finished Grant's cake it had stopped completely.

By a narrow vote, crew B opted for boogie boarding at the public beach over snorkeling in the laguna, in part because we felt the water would have been stirred up by the storm and thus pretty murky. The three SCUBA scouts joined us for the beach trip, while Tom and Bernie (a leader from the other crew) drove back to Jake's Laundromat to dry all the bedding that had been soaked in the storm. The boogie boarding was as much fun as ever, the surf was up but not dangerously so and the action was good.

After supper, the Island Adventure crew went "piggy perching" at a local dock. This was bottom fishing with shrimp for bait. We caught a few fish, but there was not a lot of action. Species we caught were several sunfish, a catfish, a crab, and a dog fish.

The SCUBA crew went night snorkeling from the shore of the laguna and was quite disappointed because of the poor visibility and lack of photoplankton. This was a real wash-out for them.

Day 8: Friday, June 28

This was to be our last full day in camp. The morning Island Adventure activity was to go surf fishing, but



there was not much action. A total of one teeny sunfish was caught, not counting the seaweed that Joey dragged up. But most of the crew had fun catching crabs and “baby-sitting” them in a nest they made of rocks.

The SCUBA crew went back the class room to learn dive tables and get signed off on everything.

In the afternoon, the Island Adventurers went snorkeling in the laguna from the shore north of town. This turned out to be one of the best activities of the week and all had a great time. The water was clear and many fish were seen, including some 18” zebra fish and 12” stripers. We stayed much longer than we originally planned because we were enjoying ourselves so much. We did leave time for a last trip to the public beach for a final hour or two of boogie boarding.



The SCUBA crew spent the afternoon visiting Mexico and came back with the proper assortment of sunglasses and watches.

After supper, we had a pachanga (Mexican party) with a piñata filled with awful Mexican candy and then had a closing campfire and were given our Laguna Station patches.

Day 9: Saturday, June 29

We were up early because we had a long way to drive before night. We grabbed a portable but not very nutritious breakfast at the near-by Circle K store and were on the road by 7:30 AM. There is not a lot to report on the day. There was rain off and on all day and a lot of road construction slowed us down. We had lunch just before San Antonio and watched the Texas scenery for a total of 637 miles before we left the state. Twenty-one miles into Oklahoma, we stopped at a KOA at about 6:45 PM long enough to pitch our tents and then headed into the town of Marietta to have our Pizza pig-out at their Pizza Hut. We also were able to find some ear medicine that Grant needed for a problem he was having. Back at the camp ground many of us took advantage of the showers available. The total miles driven today was 658.



Day 10: Sunday, June 30

We got another early start and were on the road by 7:30 AM. We had smoother driving in Oklahoma and Kansas and the miles rolled along. Lunch was at a Wendy's at the end of the Kansas turnpike (where there are minimal services). Luke and Seth were tired of Wendy's food since that is where they work, so they went across the street to Taco Bell.



In Kansas City we were smart enough to take the 435 by-pass to avoid downtown. Just north of KC we had a Dairy Queen break and then started the final stretch home. The last few miles seemed to take forever, especially with the anticipation of

getting home making a few of the scouts unusually active. We pulled into Tom's driveway at about 7:15 PM, unloaded the cars, and then everyone went home to enjoy their own beds.

