
City Set On a Hill: Pathfinders in Colorado

by Bonnie Dwyer

Jennifer Cline of Loma Linda highlighted the experiences that many of the 16,027 other Pathfinders at Camp Hale, Colorado, will probably remember most vividly. She cryptically wrote in her diary: "Wednesday—arrived around 9:30; walked around exploring; found friends, unpacked, etc.; evening events—laser; Saturday: BLAST!...Talked with G."

Brian Syfert of Tappahannock, Virginia epitomized the Pathfinders' enthusiasm. Sure, he had severely sprained his ankle jumping from hay bales near the headquarters tent, but, he said, he had put a plastic bag over his walking cast and gone swimming. Now he was going to go mountain rappelling.

The many union and conference presidents who joined the campers this summer at the first North American Division Pathfinder camporee obviously shared the campers' feeling that their week together, July 31 to August 6, was an unforgettable experience. At a meeting this autumn, the union presidents of the North American Division voted that the approximately \$1.2 million (almost completely paid for by campers' fees) was well spent, and discussed the importance of holding a North American Pathfinder camporee every five years.

Camp Hale is west of Denver, over the Continental Divide from Leadville, Colorado, a city two miles above sea level. Campers arriving on Wednesday drove sev-

everal miles along a long, winding road high above the camp. As the Pathfinders approached, the tiny specks they saw in the valley below became large striped tents; a balloon the size of a small dirigible; the largest authentic Indian tepee ever made (30 feet in diameter); flags on 30-foot poles from every state in the Union, as well as Canada and Bermuda; a replica of the Washington

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Monument (complete with two alternating red warning lights); and ranks upon ranks of family-sized tents. The campers were looking at what would be, with all the visitors on the weekend, a city of 18,000—the second largest, said the Denver newspapers, in western Colorado.

After they set up their tents in the area assigned to them, campers could go exploring. The camp covered four miles of the six-mile Eagle River Valley. In the central area of the camp huge tents housed the headquarters, camp store and the honors midway displaying Pathfinders' work in animal husbandry, stone collecting, knot tying and other areas. On the other side of the Eagle River, across five wooden bridges built just

for the camporee, the colonies of campers were grouped according to unions and conferences. Each conference of the Columbia Union had created an entryway to a mall, with the facade of the U.S. Capitol mounted on a truck at one end, a matching facade of the Lincoln Memorial at the other, and an iron-frame, canvas-wrapped Washington Monument standing in the middle. A rocket and spaceship with twinkling lights marked the Southern Union's emphasis on the future. A log fort, complete with lookout

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tower, stood at the entrance to the Pacific Union campground. Flags along a split-rail fence marked the entrance to the Mid-America camp at the far end of Camp Hale.

Walking along the dusty road at the foot of the mountains behind the camp, Pathfinders could discover further bursts of creativity—North American Adventists exploring their culture. Pathfinders from Virginia had constructed an entire frontier log cabin in a forest clearing. Farther along, the North Pacific Union had created a mining town, complete with a blacksmith's forge, a country store, genuine mining cars, a miner's donkey, and a meticulously realistic western cemetery.

At a camp of Indian tepees, Val Green, a Carolina Indian, dressed in a beaded leather shirt, a feather in his long black hair, retold the history of real—not Hollywood—Indians. "For a long time Indians have had good ways of doing things," he said. He

explained that the first white men almost starved until native North Americans taught them to grow basic crops, such as corn, beans and squash. At a time when white doctors tried to cure their patients by bleeding them, Indians introduced willow bark tea, which contains an aspirin-like substance helpful for headaches. Oklahoma Indian Adventists demonstrated Indian crafts and music and told of witnessing to other Indians at tribal gatherings. "We play a lot of sports," said one woman in the group. "I try to let Jesus shine through me at the games. When I leave Friday afternoon before sundown, everyone knows why."

At the far end of the camp—two miles from camp headquarters at the edge of the North Pacific Union area—long lines formed in front of the tents representing the Old Testament Sanctuary—outer court, holy place and most holy place. In the outer court a laver, altar and slain lamb were on display. The shepherdess whose flocks usually roamed through the valley had killed and stuffed one of her lambs and donated it for the model sanctuary. "Priests" dressed in reproductions of the colorful Old Testament garb described the significance of the different gems they were wearing and explained the symbolism of each item in the holy and most holy places. It was a poem come to life. The Pathfinders asked questions—"Is the 144,000 a symbolic number?" ("Yes," replied the "priest")—and filed out, discussing the meaning of the dead lamb and the 2,300 days.

As the late afternoon sun slipped behind the Rocky Mountains, the rhythmic beating of the Allegheny East Conference drill team's drums summoned campers to the first evening meeting. Gathered by clubs, conferences and unions, campers marched to the five-acre open field assembly area. Dominating the scene was the same two-story Mitsubishi Diamond Vision screen used at the Los Angeles Olympics. Mounted by crane on top of stacked 12-foot railway containers, the screen allowed videotape technicians to record the evening programs

and project them as they happened—giving the audience live and “Memorex” versions simultaneously. Laser demonstrations were a regular part of every evening’s activities. The committee of 18 youth leaders from across the county who spent 18 months planning the evening programs had decided that they would show that the same modern technology attracting thousands of young people to concerts and sports events can enhance religious celebrations.

The Pathfinders’ reaction to the evening meetings was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The first spectacular program was the second night of the camp when Jesse Jackson, the black preacher and 1984 presidential candidate, was the main speaker. Wintley Phipps, the Adventist preacher who performed live coast-to-coast at the Democratic National Convention, sang, as did Christian vocalist Michelle Pillar. She also gave her testimony about how much Jesus had affected her life. Arriving at the camp late, she had to replace her live back-up group with a tape of her standard repertoire, including songs camp planners had asked her to omit, such as “Jesus is the Rock in Rock ‘n Roll.”

Jesse Jackson’s speech also had a musical quality, filled with rhythmic cadences. Echoing across the valley, his voice seemed to shake both the mountains and his audience: “You are somebody special, because you are God’s child.... Repeat after me, ‘I am somebody.’” The audience roared back, “I am somebody.”

Jackson moved on to other themes of his address. “Up with hope; down with dope.” He talked about lessons from the 1960s, about moral imperatives, and about drugs, which he called the greatest threat to this generation. “If you have drugs in your veins, rather than hope in your brains, you can’t make a difference.... To take drugs is morally wrong. No alien philosophy is killing as many young people as drugs.”

Then there were political issues—nuclear arms, the hungry, South Africa, stealth

bombers, the words of the Bible advising people to study war no more and Jesus’ admonishment to “love your enemy.”

At the end, Jackson came back to drugs. He made a call to any who were victimized by drugs to come to the light, to walk to the front. No one moved. Jackson pleaded. Wintley Phipps sang “Ordinary People.” Finally, a few brave souls dared the potential rebuke of their counselors to walk forward. Encouraged, Jackson kept the call open. A few more campers pushed to the stage, some, perhaps, to be close to the charismatic speaker. Hordes followed. The evening ended with Jackson pronouncing it a love feast.

What appealed to a majority of Pathfinders appalled a number of adults. Indeed, during Michelle Pillar’s singing, one North American president demanded that Les Pitton, the director of both North American youth ministries and the camporee, pull the plug on Miss Pillar’s sound equipment. He refused, but later that night and the next day Pitton heard complaints from other adults. Some leaders of Pathfinder clubs said that they were revolted by Miss Pillar’s music, as did a key group establishing the camporee—Maranatha Flights International, which sent 130 workers (aged 10-75) to construct the camp. As for Jesse Jackson, one woman said that listening to Jackson’s politics left her feeling as though she had been raped. Some adults expected all evening meetings to be strictly sacred.

Pitton stood his ground on the programs except for canceling all non-Adventist musicians. He said it was the “most unchristian thing” that he had ever had to do. He simply felt he had an obligation to hold the camporee together.

Actually, there was a lot of explicitly religious content in the high-tech, professionally produced programs. For example, on Friday night Charles Bradford, president of the North American Division and a participant throughout the camporee, narrated a program that included laser beams bouncing off the nearby mountains; the subject

was God's creation of the world. On Sabbath morning commitment cards were passed out and those in attendance were asked to choose Christ. At the end of the camp unbaptized Pathfinders were invited to make a public commitment to become baptized.

Despite the disapproval of the adults, many of the campers said that they appreciated meeting the celebrities invited to the evening programs at Camp Hale. Space Lab astronaut William Pogue described the discipline necessary to prepare for a trip to outer space. Jeff Blotnick, the Olympic gold medalist in Greco-Roman wrestling, testified how his faith had helped him in his battle with cancer.

One of the most popular programs was Saturday night. The Pathfinders were growing cold and on the point of booing a magician when they realized that Malcolm-Jamal Warner and Tempestt Bledsoe from the *Cosby* television program were part of the magician's performance. At the end of the program so many Pathfinders flooded the stage that security guards had to clear a path before the actors could reach their waiting vehicle. The next day the "Cosby kids" toured the camp, talking with groups throughout the tent city. The young actors were having so much fun visiting the Adventist campers that they stayed longer than planned and finally left only to meet unalterable travel connections.

Others appreciative of the evening programs were non-Adventists who visited Camp Hale from surrounding towns. Leadville—picturesque, but economically depressed because of the decline of the surrounding mines—was also grateful for the many job opportunities the camp provided and gave the Pathfinders an especially warm welcome. Signs welcoming the Pathfinders sprouted in store fronts the length of main street, including one bar! On one occasion, hundreds of Pathfinders spread throughout the town, cleaning up trash—just one of the

many off-camp service activities for which Pathfinder clubs volunteered.

Grumbling (mixed with some apologies to director Les Pitton) persisted from a few adults to the end of the camp. That sort of response to a Pathfinder camporee—which dramatically brought Adventism and the world together in its public meetings—was not entirely surprising for a movement that sparked controversy at its inception. When Dr. Theron Johnson in the 1930s organized the first club in his home in Santa Ana, California, to play Bible games, carry out craft projects and study nature, he was called before the church board to explain why he was bringing the world into the church. Happily, John Hancock realized how much the Pathfinders enjoyed and learned from an experience that taught them that Adventism was involved with all of life.

Although the camporee continued to Wednesday, the high point for some came Monday evening, with a special commitment service. While music played, North American youth leader Les Pitton lit the candles of each union youth director. They passed the flame on to the conference leaders, and from there it quickly spread to each conference, club and camper. The field was filled with twinkling lights as Camp Hale testified to its commitment to kindling the Christian experience.

Like the recent summer Olympics, Camp Hale defied the expectations of many. Critics were sure both events would end in disaster, but anxiety about attendance gave way to massive numbers of participants. Spectacular events at both created very special memories that will last a lifetime. During both the Olympics and the camporee, participants met for the first time people from backgrounds and outlooks very different from their own. Finally, just as the Olympics sparked a resurgence of pride in Americans, the camporee gave Adventist youth a chance to take pride in their church. It is no wonder that the leaders of the North American Division want another youth camporee as soon as possible.