

Ranch Hands: CAM Summer Camps Kick Off in Ada Watch Out for Goats, Poison Oak, Mufflers

Wow, what a way to start the summer – volunteering! The last weekend in May, an awesomely dedicated, hard-working group of twenty-five headed for Cornerstone Kids' Ranch in Ada, OK for the first Community Action Ministries CAMp of the summer. Half of the participants were first timers to CAM. (I wonder, now, if they had any idea what they were letting themselves in for...) It was also great to welcome Katie, one of our former participants and now a college student at Ada, back during the CAMp.

CAM volunteers helped prepare the ranch for their up-coming Ranch Camp, an annual event where the ranch owners Dean and Lisa Stone will share the Gospel of truth with over 250 children.

When the CAMp participants arrived, Dean had a daunting list of tasks to complete – from construction projects to deep-cleaning the huge arena, mucking out stalls and cleaning ball pens, and much more. The participants quickly broke into smaller, rotating groups and got to work.

Some participants had the privilege of using oil-based paint for the first time. When I first saw the first group assigned to this task, I wondered which had more paint on them- the post or the kids! Then, when the kids found out how hard it was to get the paint off with mineral spirits, I think they regretted having a paint fight!

Another group helped clear and burn brush (for “brush” read “forest”) and built four different elements for a low-elevation team-building ropes course. Speaking of the woods group, are any of you breaking out with poison ivy and poison oak yet? We pray God will have mercy on all that were in that area.

Speaking of injuries, Abi Hooper continued her (hopefully to-be-discontinued) tradition of getting hurt at CAMp. She was with the woods group, helping to pile brush and limbs beside the wood chipper Pastor Dean had rented for the weekend. When stepping from one side of the brush pile to the other, Abi set her hand on the chipper for balance – *directly onto the muffler*. Her father Jerry, alerted by the *tssssssssssss* sound of burning skin, took one look, turned off the chipper and, after yelling at the remaining workers “Don't touch *anything!*” got her onto the four-wheeler and headed toward the house at approximately 5/8 the speed of sound. Jerry passed me down in the barn lot and gave me that look that only a parent can know. I went racing after them while the other CAMpers yelled, “What is it!? What's going on?”

After plunging into the house and hearing the story, we discovered that Abi had – has – second-degree burns on the palm and fingers of her left hand. After running cold tap water over it, Abi soaked her hand in cold water for over 30 hours- until the heat was totally gone. I took her in to see the doctor on Monday; she told us we had done all the right things. Just so you know, never put direct ice on a bad burn, or put anything on it

until all the heat is out; those two things will cause even more damage to the flesh. She is doing better. Of course, we'll see how she feels after basketball camp this week...

Christian discovered a new sport – weed wacker walking – for what seemed like miles and miles (the ranch has 153 acres, and his group walked quite a ways around it!). Tabi apparently enjoyed weed eating so much she decided to blaze her own trail through the woods, eventually stumbling upon the woods group who luckily pointed her in the right direction. We all had a good laugh at that (once we figured out where she was).

Other groups trimmed limbs around the campfire area, spread mulch, and watered new trees. They also cleaned out the station where the elementary age kids will “pan for gold” – don't get too excited, though, it's only fool's gold. Two-person teams kept the pressure washer going 12 hours a day (a little exaggeration, though not much) cleaning the arena, horse stalls, farm equipment and patios. The smelliest job was cleaning out the petting farm area and horses stalls, where workers took occasional breaks to chase goats out of (or into) stalls. And off the lawn. And through the gates. And around fences. And under other fences. And drag them out of upturned food buckets – literally upending the trashcan-sized tubs with two – count them, two! – goats inside at one point. The pig, though cleaning up after her (or him?) was a mess, had far better manners. I think I saw one participant with a clothespin on her nose... just kidding, but she wanted one!

Pastor Dean lightened the load quite a bit by providing a smorgasbord of FUN things to do during the evenings. We had canoe races down by the campfire (which became especially entertaining as evening wore on and the canoe-ers were navigating pretty much by the light from the flashes of other people's cameras), took turns on a huge barn swing, spent time on the water slide, and had a firework show. After a small spectacle where one horse expressed his *very strong inclination* to not be ridden that evening by ripping down part of the arena wall, a few of the group were having doubts about horseback riding. The other horses, however, behaved themselves, even putting some of the participants enough at ease to overcome their fear and give it a try. Erin went from apprehensive tears to huge smiles before it was all over – no mean feat, because she was sitting pretty on Samson, who, though very mild-mannered, stands six feet tall!

Peyton learned the importance of putting on sunscreen– the hard way. He was the only one that went home with major sunburn blisters, some the size of nickels, on the back of his neck. He also wishes he had night vision after walking off a four-foot wall, scraping his elbows. Hopefully at the next CAMp he'll be less accident-prone!

We spent some time in the Word of God each morning, which was a new experience for about half of the participants. We gave them guidelines to fill out as they did their morning devotion. We suggested that those who were unfamiliar with reading the Bible everyday might start with a book of Proverbs. Since Thursday was May 30, we recommended starting in Proverbs 30. From there, we suggested reading in one of the Gospels; John is a good place for beginners to start. We talked about the many different ways to study the Word, such as going through a whole book, and picking a topic and reading scriptures on that topic, just to name a couple.

Alysa did a great job during the first evening devotion, discussing the importance of knowing the books and structure of the Bible. She gave everyone a bookmark that listed the names of the books of the Bible, as well which category the books are in, such as History, Poetry, Major Prophets, etc. It was news to many of the participants that Genesis was not the first book written, but rather Job is the oldest book in the Bible. Alysa used a Power Point presentation very creatively to lead the group in a game of Jeopardy, forcing us all to get into the Word to find the answers.

Abi lead devotion out by the campfire. Her message encouraged the listeners to be in the world, but not of the world. Although this phrase is not found in the Bible, it is true to the ideas found in Romans 12:2, where believers are told not to “conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” She discussed the distinctions between things that are secular, and things that are godly. She asked the participants whether – and how – the people who know them outside their churches or ministries know that they are followers of Jesus, and encouraged them to find ways to live up to the command Jesus gave us in Mark 16:15 to “preach the gospel to the whole world”. She asked people to share testimonies of when and how they have shared the message of Christ, touching on the idea that for most of the ministry we do, someone else will most likely see the ultimate fruition of it. For example, the work CAMp participants do has often opened doors for the leadership to share the Gospel with the people we serve, in some cases even leading to their salvation, even though the participants did not necessarily do any verbal “preaching”. Abi then discussed some of the difficulties that come with living in this manner, such as persecution from a world that “hates” Jesus’ followers because we have been “chosen out of” that world (John 15:19). She challenged us to 2:14 it, to “do all things with our grumbling or complaining” – which was sometimes a challenge with all the kind of work we were doing (Philippians 2:14). Abi ended with this, “I hope that after this CAMp, when you go home and things get hard because of your faith that you will allow God to use you to minister to people and lead them to Christ.”

Pastor Dean and his wife Lisa are very appreciative of all the hard work that went into helping them prepare to share the Gospel with the up coming elementary kids. Despite the minor injuries, the setbacks, the poison oak, the paint fights, the four-wheeler with no reverse gear, and the goats ... we managed to cross off *every single item* on the list Dean gave us. Way to go, CAM! Jason, one of Cornerstone’s staff members, was also full of gratitude. When walking back with Jerry toward the house one evening, past the freshly painted gateposts, the clean and organized petting zoo, the power-washed arena, Jason remarked, “You know, y’all are one of my favorite groups to come here ... and I’m not just saying that because you make my work easier!”

We pray that the CAMp blessed those that were able to attend. It was a pleasure to serve with you, and we hope to see you at a later event as well. Thank you!

--Donna Hooper