

Troop 116 - Wekiwa Springs 2011 - By Dan McFalls

Universal Studios / Wekiwa Springs Trip
BSA Troop 116
December 27-31, 2011

For our annual end-of-year trip in 2011, Troop 116 headed south, back to Florida, this time to enjoy a stay at the Wekiwa Springs State Park and venture to Universal Studios for two days of gimmicky, high-adrenaline fun. The other day was spent at camp observing and taking in the nature around us.

Day 1 was the travel day to Florida. The trip is an eight-hour trek that takes, for all intents and purposes, an entire day to complete. We had to rent 15-passenger vans to transport the scouts due to a lack of drivers, so our caravan consisted of three vans and a few cars. The trip did not present any major delays, and the drive to Florida is much less painful than one would be led to believe. After a few quick stops and before we knew it, we had arrived at the entrance to the campsite at Wekiwa Springs State Park. The facilities at the camp are top-notch—cabins with beds and heat, fully-operational kitchen and dining hall, bathhouse, and beautiful surrounding scenery. Needless to say, the scouts were spoiled much more than usual, and the camp treated us well. After arriving and unloading the trailer, we ate dinner, talking about the plan for the next day, and got a good night's rest.

We woke up early the following morning eager to venture to Universal Studios for our first day of long lines, roller-coasters, gimmicky attractions, and delicious, over-priced snacks and magical fun. We ate a quick breakfast in camp and headed straight for the theme park. The youngest scouts were accompanied by an adult while they were at the park, while the older scouts were only assigned an adult to check in with every few hours. We were in the park from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM on this day, eating lunch in the park. The parks were quite crowded from the time we got there until we left; the time between Christmas and New Years is busy for the parks. Consequently, wait times could become extremely long if one did not plan prudently. My personal favorite attractions at the park include the "Dragon Challenge" roller coaster, which was renamed from "Dueling Dragons" after being incorporated into the new Harry Potter themed section, The Mummy, a fast-paced cinematic ride, a new high-thrill coaster that allowed the rider to choose music to listen to while riding, and of course the deliciously unhealthy churros.

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After tiring ourselves with hours of festivities, we regrouped at the world's largest Hard Rock Café, which was centered between the two parks. Once everyone got together, we returned to the vans and headed back to the campground after grabbing a quick dinner on the way back. We rested for a short while, met to get introductions to our Merit Badge classes, and then enjoyed a few hours of free time before proceeding to go to bed.

The third day was spent mostly in camp. Scouts who were under First Class or who were taking the Nature merit badge got up early to go on a five mile hike around the surrounding area to witness the beautiful scenery and wildlife that Florida has to offer. Once these scouts returned, everybody formed into their groups to begin working on the bulk of the work for their merit badge classes. The badges being offered included Nature, Mammal Study, Environmental Science, and Traffic Safety. There was also a course that worked on scout skills. Most scouts were in two classes, and these took up the majority of the time between lunch and dinner. Some of the older scouts who only had one class helped do work around the camp, helped lead classes, or helped prepare for troop activities later that day. After the classes were finished and before dinner, we gathered in the parking lot and took a quick drive to the Wekiwa hot springs. The springs were a meeting place and paradise for Native Americans, who used it as a crossroads for trade and settlement. Some scouts swam in the "hot" springs, while others simply enjoyed the nice day. After this, we returned to camp, ate dinner, sat around a short campfire, watched a movie in the dining hall, and went to bed early so we could get to the park quickly the next day.

We woke up earlier on this morning so that we could get to the park right at its opening, allowing us to quickly rush to our favorite rides and get a seat with barely a wait. Most groups used the knowledge from the first day to plan out an intricate set of actions to execute to maximize fun during the first hour of minimal crowds. The rest of the day went just as the first had—non stop high-adrenaline fun. At the end of the day, some groups decided to stay at the park for a few extra hours and eat dinner at one of the park's restaurants. At around 7:00, everybody had left the park and gotten on their way back to camp. Scouts cleaned the dining hall and kitchen to avoid extra working in the morning, packed their possessions and went to bed. The next day, we finished cleaning the cabins and bathhouse, got our camp inspection, and headed back home.