

1999 Venture Trip

July 2 –11

Laguna Station, South Padre, Texas

Troop 275 – Ames, Iowa

1999 Venture Crew Photo:



Back L to R: 1) Brad Osborn, 2) our "Mate", 3) Max Rothschild, 4) Tom Meyer
Front L to R: 5) Cameron Osborn, 6) Dan Rothschild, 7) Nick Persaud, 8) Luke Houghton

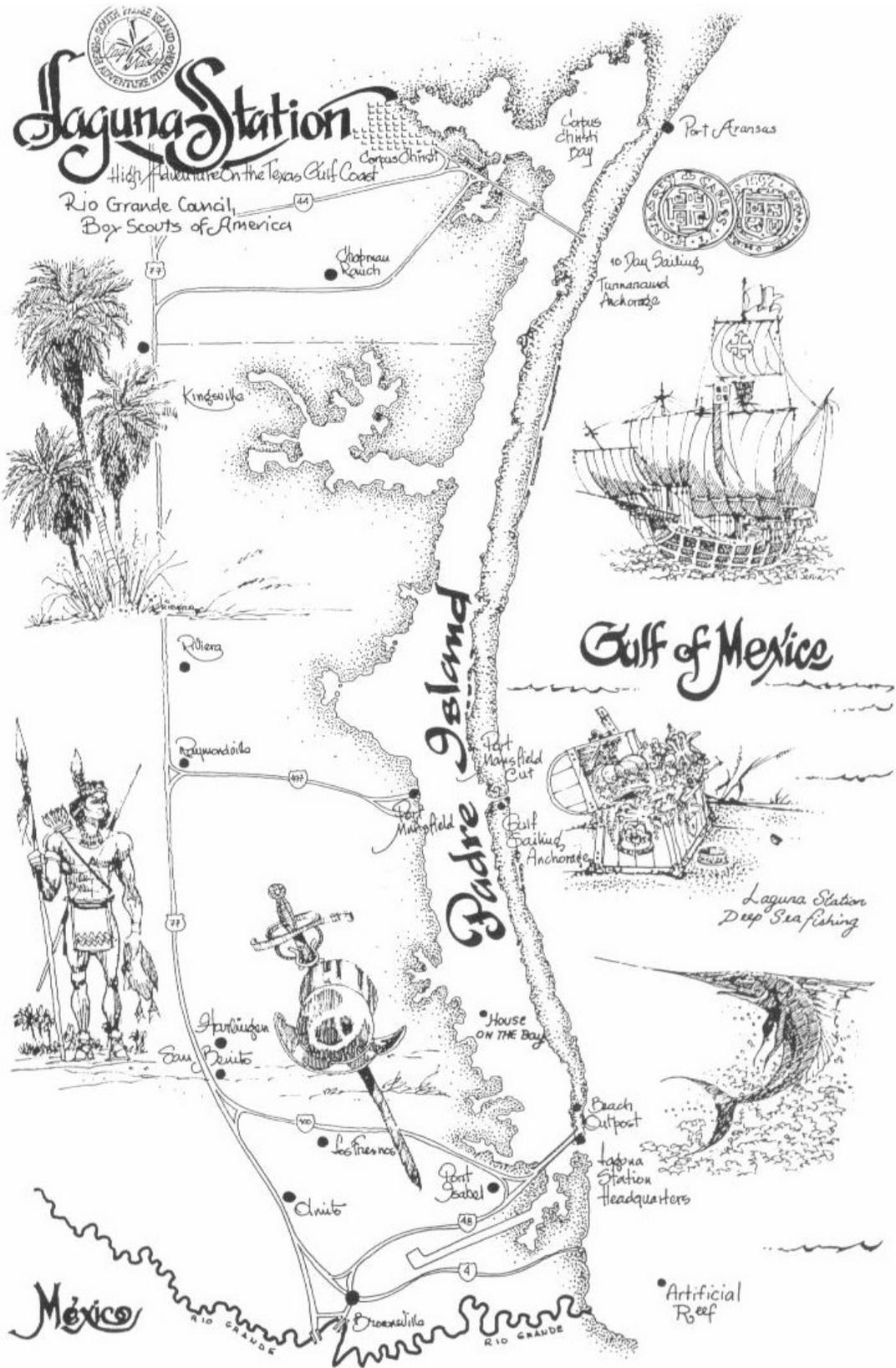
1999 Venture Crew T-shirt:



1999 Venture Crew Patch:



1999 Map(s):





1999 Venture Crew Journal

Troop 275 Venture Trip
Laguna Madre, South Padre Island, TX
July 2-11, 1999

Day 1: Friday, July 2, 1999

Quote of the day: "Hey, Kansas isn't in black and white!" - Tom

Everyone assembled at the Meyer residence by 8:00 AM eager to get on with the adventure. After the usual group photo, the four scouts piled into Brad's van and most of the gear and Max and Tom went into Tom's van. Tom didn't take it personally that none of the scouts wanted to ride in his van, it's just that he doesn't have a video system and Nintendo player like Brad does.



We got off around 8:15 and had an uneventful ride to Kansas City, where we picked on Burger King for lunch. Brad was glad everyone could have their own headphones, so he could drive in peace, except when someone would wipe out in a Nintendo game and all four scouts would startle him by yelling their disappointment together. We had a short ice cream break at a Hardee's along the Kansas Turnpike. Most of the Kansas and Oklahoma driving was into a fierce South wind, which cut down on the gas mileage and slowed us a bit.

At 6:15 PM, we arrived at the Pioneer RV Resort near Guthrie, OK, where we had a reservation. It was a "no frills" resort as such things go, but offered everything we needed: tent space, water, indoor plumbing, and a small store. The weather was hot and humid, but a breeze made it more bearable and kept the bugs down. Danny and Tom set up a duty roster and soon dinner was heating. We couldn't help noticing the man who lived behind the campground in an old bus, but who had a very prosperous-looking garden. The main excitement at dinner was the Vesuvius-like flare-up of the stove as it burned off fuel that had leaked out in storage – or so we hoped. Once it died down, the stove worked fine. After dinner, the scouts enjoyed themselves on some old farm equipment near the campsite. Tom was the only one to sleep under the stars, but he had a pleasant night and didn't get eaten by bugs or rained on. The excitement of the night was from a seemingly mufflerless truck that roared by the campsite several times. It disturbed the sleepers inside the tents every bit as much as it did Tom.

Before turning in we borrowed a tradition from Philmont: “thorns and roses”. Each person had the opportunity to tell what his “roses” (good things) and “thorns” (bad things) were for the day. We continued this daily for the rest of the trip.

Distance for the day: 560 miles

Day 2: Saturday, July 3, 1999

Quote of the day: “Oh, man!!!!” - All four scouts together as someone wiped out in Nintendo.

Everyone was up by 6 AM, and it didn’t even take a lot of prodding - a bit, maybe, but not a lot. Breakfast was inhaled quickly and we were on the road by 7:30 AM. Max and Tom took notes on which exits in southern Oklahoma had campgrounds for the return trip, when we will need to drive in two days what we did in two and a half days going down. The south wind was still strong while in Oklahoma. In mid-morning we crossed the border into less windy Texas, our destination state, but there was another 625 miles of it to South Padre Island.

For lunch we again hit on a Burger King, this time near Waco, TX. We arrived at the Hill Country RV Resort in New Braunfels, TX (just north of San Antonio) by 3:30 PM. Again, we had a reservation. This was anything but a bare-bones campground. They had a recreation center and indoor pool. There were many RVs which looked quite permanent, some with satellite TV dishes. We got our tents pitched under some cabanas so they would be dry in the morning since it threatened to rain (and did). We had a nice long swim in the pool and practiced for the Laguna Station swim test.

We were joined by Max’s brother Dave, a physician living in Houston. The resemblance was striking, but it was easy to tell them apart, Max being the one with the beard. Dave brought Max and Danny some salt water fishing equipment to use and gave some helpful hints on how to use it. The afternoon and evening were a mixture of sun and rain, sometimes changing quite rapidly, but with little or no breeze. It remained hot and humid, but we decided we’d better get used to it; South Padre Island was sure to be as bad.

Sleeping was a bit less comfortable because of the heat and humidity and because of an outdoor light on the pool building that caused a green glow in our tents. Luke slept soundly with the satisfaction of having beat world 3 on Mario.

Distance for the day: 470 miles.

Day 3: Sunday, July 4

Quote of the day: “Are we there yet?” – All

We again got an early start, being on the road by 7:15 AM. There was no wind, but quite a bit of rain. Lunch was at a Wendy’s in Harlingen, about forty miles from Laguna Station. The last bit seemed to take

forever, but at least we were arriving well before the 3 PM deadline we were concerned about. After crossing the causeway to South Padre Island, we followed the directions into the Isla Blanca Park, but then we were unable to find the Laguna Station sign referred to in the directions. The result was a tour through the public beach area and back to the entrance, where we tried again. This time we followed a turn to the right to something called “Dolphin Cove” and we quickly spotted some distinctly scout-like tents behind the buildings. Sure enough, it was Laguna Station. Unfortunately it was also raining bucketsful so we just waited in the cars for it to stop. After about twenty minutes, it slowed enough so Tom and Danny could go try to check us in. This was not so easy, since no one from the camp appeared to be around, and there was no obvious office. Finally, someone pointed out the buildings behind us, where we found a hand-lettered sign for Laguna Station under a door marked “Bingo Parlor” next to an Oyster Bar.



It turned out that the camp was in a part of a county park leased by the scouts for the summer. The office served extra duty as the trading post, quartermaster’s area, and infirmary. The only permanent structures in the tent area were the bathhouse and an open pavilion where we had our meals. Lodging was in two-man scout tents on palettes, similar to Mitigwa. There were about 30 of these in a grid. We were assigned four tents in row E. Brad and Max took the first, Danny and Cameron the

second, Luke and Nick the third and Tom lived in the fourth one. Despite the rather Spartan physical appearance, the location was really prime, on the very southern tip of the island, with a good view of high-rise resorts belonging to such national chains as Radisson, Ramada, and Holiday Inn. We were next to the shipping channel and were excited to see that the name “Dolphin Cove” was well chosen – there was a pod of bottlenosed dolphins just off shore.

The first item of business was our swim tests, for which we were bused to a beach area on the Laguna Madre (inland) side of the island, north of the developed area. The drive up followed the main (almost only) north-south road on the island, past T-shirt shops and other tourist-oriented businesses. Just north of town, the driver took a turn-off and drove across the packed beach sand for a few hundred yards to deposit us near the shore. We gaped as he drove across the sand, but the driver was used to it and we didn’t get stuck. This was one of the few areas where the water gets deep enough near shore to do a proper swim test, which we all passed easily.



Back at camp, we had free time until the camp assembled to strike the colors at 7:20 before having dinner. Some of us tried our hands at wade fishing off the small beach at the camp, but without success. Sometime during the period Cameron acquired some pet ants in his pants. Others found some hermit crabs (the first of many during the week) along the beach. Dolphin watching was also a popular activity.



Dinner was served in the pavilion and was catered by a local eatery called "Al's". After the heat and rain of the day, we appreciated the cool sea breeze on the point where the dining pavilion is. Afterwards, we got our schedule for the week, met our mate, Chris, and then watched the Fourth of July fireworks across the lagoon. We were too far away to hear them, but there were some nice aerial displays.

Distance for the day: 230 miles.

Distance from Ames to Laguna Station: 1230 miles.

Day 4: Monday, July 5

Quote of the day: "Danny - head up, feet down!" Brad, as Danny was caught by a wave.

In the morning, Chris drove us up to the same area where we had done our swimming tests and taught us to use the snorkeling gear. We spent the rest of the morning looking at underwater wildlife and



watching for sunburn on our backs. We saw a wide variety of sea life despite water that was far from clear. We spotted flounder, scallops, clams, crabs, Sergeant majors, and several other kinds of fish. Chris warned us to shuffle our feet as we walked to scare away stingrays.

The afternoon brought more rain, wind and relative cold (mid-70's?). Instead of going to the outpost camp north of town, we chose to go boogie boarding at the nearby public beach. Boogie boards are buoyant boards used to help

body surfing. Because of the weather, the surf was up, but not dangerously so. Everyone enjoyed the boards and body surfing, although we later found the wear on our chests from the boards was not to be ignored. The water temperature was about the same as the air and, despite occasional rain, we had a blast. The main down side was a sea gull that made a successful strafing run at Max. Chris did his good

deed of the day by helping treat a girl that was stung by a jellyfish, by applying meat tenderizer to the area. It doesn't kill the pain completely, but it helps; and it quieted the girl's sobs.

Back in camp, Luke, Nick and Cameron went to a bait shop and bought 75 to 100 bait shrimp – each.

Dinner was supposed to have been a beach cookout at the outpost camp, but instead we retired to the pavilion in front of the office and cooked our hot dogs there.

After dinner we again tried our luck wade fishing off the sailing beach, and this time we had some action. Luke caught an 8 to 10 inch sea trout, the first fish of the trip.

Day 5: Tuesday, July 6

Quote of the day: "I'm glad I'm not on a salt-free diet", Tom as he swallowed half a wave.



The plan for the morning was trying to wind surf. While waiting for Chris to show up we saw some sea slugs near shore. These are brown and beige critters about eight inches long with ray-like wings on the side. Wind surfing was challenging, with some of us at least getting up for a minute or two. Others found it quite frustrating and chose to paddle around in the sea kayaks instead. A rainsquall brought us in early and some went fishing and eventually the shrimp were tossed out to sea before they spoiled, much

to the delight of the sea gulls. Sea gulls are not very sociable birds. Any gull with food in its mouth can count on being attacked by all its mates as they try to steal it.

In the afternoon, we were again able to wind surf and sea kayak. We eventually tired of these activities and went back to the public beach, which was much less crowded, now that the holiday weekend was over. The surf was nothing like the day before, but it was still a lot of fun.

Before dinner, Max caught a good-sized (so he said) red fish.



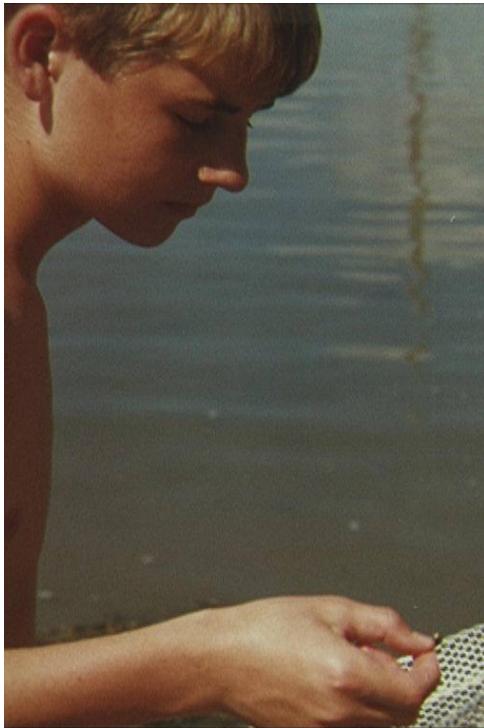
After dinner we waited for dark to return to the snorkeling area for a night snorkel. Bioluminescence is cool! There was plankton that emitted a green glow if you disturbed the water. We all enjoyed watching green clouds punctuated with bright green streaks form around our moving hands, like having

a miniature fireworks display at our command. In addition, the group saw a stingray, hermit crabs, a big sergeant major and many small fish.

Day 6: Wednesday, July 7

*Quotes of the day: "The twenty-five dollar Rolexes are over here." - A Mexican merchant.
"Do you have any ten dollar Rolexes?" - Luke's reply.*

In the morning, Kim (the Laguna Station program director and a student in Marine Biology) led us on a tour of the University of Texas Marine Biology lab near the camp. There were many interesting exhibits of fish, crustaceans, and other local wild life. Following the tour we went out on a breakwater to observe what wildlife we could. Danny got a particularly close look as he fell in. Unfortunately, he lost his sunglasses in the process and they were not retrievable.



The afternoon activity was invading Mexico. More specifically, we drove to the town of Progreso, MX. We all enjoyed over an hour in an air-conditioned van. In about fifteen minutes, everyone (except Tom, who was driving) was asleep. We parked on the American side of the bridge over the Rio Grande and walked over, for a toll of twenty-five cents each. Even while we were on the bridge we sensed the cultural difference. Little hands poked through the bridge's chain link fence as we neared the Mexican side, asking for handouts. Much as we would have liked to help, we had

been warned that we would be surrounded by

fifty kids in half a block if we did. The town was totally geared to the tourist trade – US dollars were apparently the only currency used. Both sides of



the street were lined with small shops selling T-shirts of every description (and I mean EVERY), jewelry, sunglasses, and much, much more. Many products were “name” brands, almost all of them at such low prices as to insure they were fakes. Several of the boys bought “Oakley” sunglasses for seven to nine dollars each. Luke was not successful in finding his ten dollar Rolex, however. A number of dentist shops were offering such cut-rate services as a set of braces for only \$1200. Tom stayed with Max and Danny as they looked for a replacement for the sunglasses Danny deep-sixed earlier in the day. Brad tried to stay with Cameron, Luke, and Nick as they raced from shop to shop in search of special bargains. In one shop they gained a new appreciation for the art of figure sculpture. At one point, Luke got “bombed” by a blob of wet mortar from some men working on a roof. Following advice, we avoided food and drink, tempting as the one-dollar frozen Margaritas were to the adults. After an hour and a half, we met near the bridge to return to the US. We stopped at a near-by convenience store for drinks and snacks before returning to the van. This time Max drove while Tom napped. We got back just in time for striking the colors, but did not have time to change into our uniforms.

For an evening activity we went to a public pier next to the yacht club and tried our hand at night fishing. This consisted of bobbing bait (chunks of fish) off the pier. Just about everyone caught something, but we learned quickly that one needs an experienced person around, since almost every fish pulled out brought a response of “don’t touch that” from Chris. Some of the touchable fish were a catfish and a perch. The untouchables were ribbonfish, which were a beautiful, shiny-silver eighteen-inch eel-like non-game fish with sharp teeth, and a dogfish with very sharp spines.

Day 7: Thursday, July 8

Quote of the day: “I’m the aquatic director and I want to sail under the bridge!” – Dave

A good steady breeze gave us ideal conditions for our sailing activity during the morning. Everyone tried it and had a good time. Tom had a particularly long sail because he went out in a dolphin (a lateen rig two person boat) with the aquatic director (Dave) who stated the quote of the day. The bridge in question was the causeway linking the island to the mainland. It was well out of bounds for the scout area, but a good, easy route to sail. Dave and Tom each enjoyed a turn at the helm. Getting under the bridge and back was a bit tricky because in was almost too far into the wind, but they made it without incident. On the way back, they recognized the camp laser (a larger class of sailboat) which had Chris and Brad in it. They had been concerned when Tom and Dave disappeared from view, apparently fearing that they had fallen off the edge of the earth. Since Brad had been covetously eyeing the laser all week, he was happy to have the chance to go out in it. As they neared camp, Tom and Dave started to have trouble. The hull of the



dolphin had shipped so much water that it became unresponsive, with the result that they fell overboard several times and capsized once. The boat was easily righted and they eventually got back OK and drained the water out of the hull. Everyone returned in good spirits and the camp management didn't come down very hard on the miscreants who went out of bounds.



Sailing continued after lunch, with more of us going out in the laser. Also everyone by now had tried the sea kayaks, with several of us spending a lot of time paddling around in them. Later in the afternoon, most of us explored along the shore. On the beach, there was an old wreck of a wooden-hulled ship, which gave us the opportunity to speculate on what happened to it. Our surmise is that it caught fire, was abandoned, and drifted in to shore, where got partially

buried in the sand. All we know for sure is that it was on the shore, covered mostly with sand, and had a charred hull. Many of the boys went looking for hermit crabs, which they found in just about every shell they picked up. There were some nice conch shells, which we would have liked to bring back with us, but since they were inhabited, we left them where we found them. The dolphins added to the scene by coming particularly close to shore and putting on a display both for us and for the commercial dolphin-watcher boats.

At dinner, Danny learned he needs to watch where he sits down, as he got on one end of his anatomy what his father got on another a few days earlier.

At dark we drove north to the end of the road, where the dunes were starting to reclaim the pavement. There we made ourselves comfortable in the sand and listened to Chris do a spiel on astronomy. Stars are not Chris' strongest area, but he gave it a good try and we enjoyed the clear night and many stars. The viewing was not hindered by light pollution, but the combination of humid air and clouds near the horizon limited what we could see.

Day 8: Friday, July 9

Quote of the day: "I peed in it" – Nick, swimming in the gulf

Our morning began with a visit to "Sea Turtle, Inc.", an organization founded in 1977 by "the turtle lady", Ila Loetscher. She is now in her nineties and a staff of volunteers is continuing much of the work. We heard an excellent talk about the threats to all seven species of sea turtles and what is being done to try to preserve them. They had two Kemp ridley turtles in a tank for us to watch - and pet, if we were willing to wash with an anti-bacterial soap afterwards, since turtles can carry many diseases such as salmonella.



After the sea turtles, we went shopping along the tourist strip of South Padre. We stopped at several of the better T-shirt stores, passing up the 5 shirts for \$10 “bargains” for something of a little better quality. We also stopped at a very interesting kite shop, which had lots of quality playthings. The selection of yo-yos was excellent, as was the array of kites. But \$300 seemed a bit pricey for a kite.

Our afternoon was spent at a more secluded beach on the gulf north of the town. We drove to the access then went several miles along the beach before stopping. The surf was not very high, but that did not stop us from having a good time. Several times we were attacked by schools of “kamikaze” fish, critters about two inches long that swim very fast and don’t look where they are going. They kept ramming into us and Cameron even wound up with one in his shorts.



Back at camp, some of us passed the time before dinner by playing baseball near the tents. Dinner was the start of the Pachanga, a festival to which we wore the brightest and most colorful clothes we had. The food was Tex-Mex and afterwards there was a piñata in the likeness of the Teletubby, Tinky-Winky. Danny was our chosen whacker and he got a couple of good licks in, but didn’t break it open. Afterwards, we had our closing

assembly and received our Laguna Station patches.



Day 9: Saturday, July 10

Quote of the day: “”



Everyone was up and packing for the road at 6 AM. We did a pretty good job of not disturbing the rest of the camp as we assembled in the office for cold cereal and juice. The caffeine addicts stopped at a Circle-K convenience store for coffee before we hit the road home. We were on the road just after 7 AM, thanks to the cooperation of all.

By lunchtime, we were again in New Braunfels, where we had spent the night on the way down. The drive was long and uneventful, with little wind to hinder us. Near Fort Worth we had some serious rainstorms and saw at least three accidents. At last, we crossed into Oklahoma and also into fairer weather. It had taken all day and 625 miles to get out of Texas. At 6:15 PM we took Exit 1 to find the Indian Country RV Park, one of the ones noted by Max and Tom on the way down. It turned out to be a nice enough park, but we were the youngest people there by decades. The boys enjoyed the miniature golf course and then we

drove into the town of Marietta for a pig-out at Pizza Hut. During our nightly “thorns and roses” session, all agreed that the thorn of the day was leaving Laguna Station.



Distance for the day: 650 miles.

Day 10: Sunday, July 11

Despite our pizza hangovers we got up at 6 AM and had our usual road breakfast of instant oatmeal and hot drinks (cocoa for the boys, coffee for the adults). Again we made it onto the highway around 7 AM. There was not much activity as we just piled on the miles headed for home. Lunch was at a Hardee’s on the Kansas turnpike and by mid-afternoon we were in Kansas City. Tom called all the parents to warn them that we would be dropping hungry people off around 7:00 PM. They promised to throw them a stale crust of bread in the corner when they arrived. Our ice cream break was in the town of Cameron, MO, just north of Kansas City.

As expected, we were back in Ames just before 7:00. It was good to be home, but it was a fun, adventure-filled week.

**Distance for the day: 680 miles.
Total distance for the trip: 2660 miles**

