

## Long Road Trips with Boy Scouts

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to make several multi-day road trips with Scouts. As such, I've learned a few things that may help your unit if you are considering it. The obvious ones like pre-checking the vehicle's condition-tires, oil, full fuel tank, and having tools make sense. We try to use economic mini vans except for the tow vehicle. Better fuel-mileage rates. We also make sure we don't over load the vehicles. Would you like to sit three wide in a mini-van? Me neither! We allow the boys to bring snacks, some of the Moms even bake up fresh treats to take for the road. Bless their hearts! They don't go to waste.

- We have priced out busses, trains and airplanes to get to our destination. Most of time it's too expensive to consider for very long. Remember you still need to secure transportation on the other end without a POV.
- Rental cars are an option if your drivers don't want to put the mileage on their own vehicles, but it adds to the overall cost. Which adds to everyone's individual shared cost.
- We get on the road early with everyone fed and bladders empty. Don't want to start in a traffic jam.
- We pack the first day's lunches so we can eat at a Rest Area along the route.
- We also use Rest Areas for pit stops, more stalls to work with. Gas stations usually have just a single men and women restroom, or worse, just one to share. Also, plan on a longer delay if the gas station has a convenience store, Amazing how long it takes boys to try and find something to spend their money on.
- Bring a football, soccer ball or frisbee for those Rest Area breaks. Stretch out those arms and legs some.
- Remember, scouting requires we don't travel in convoys, but you do want everyone to get to the destination safely and together. We don't convoy, but do travel in pairs or threes in case someone needs help or are just unsure of the route. It also helps to keep the others in sight or within cellphone range. We discuss and agree on the next planned stop and route to it. Have your passenger, call the other cars if you need to deviate from the plan. The lead vehicle blazes the trail and reports any problems to the rest.

**Note:** Let the Driver drive! Use another adult or older scout to act as the navigator/communications person.

- As for the Navigator/Communications person, we've found that if they are comfortable with using both a current large format road atlas and an up-to-date Navigation app, it works best. The atlas gives a great overall view and the Nav App is best for close in. Also, the road atlas isn't dependent on cell service that can drop off when you need it most. Try to settle on which application you are going to rely on. Each of the providers seem to give a similar route, but another may be better. My most frustrating trip was when I had people with three cellphones and two GPSs all giving me different directions. Before you leave, check for last minute route conditions – Road construction, forecasted weather, possible delays for rush hour, etc. It's beyond appreciation for the driver to know which side of the road the exit will come up on and what roads you are looking for before you get to it. Less stressful and safer for all. Our trip to DC/Pennsylvania was so much better when, as the driver, my navigator could get us through some challenging routes with little stress.
- If your route takes you on toll roads, make sure **all** the vehicles in your group have an I-Pass or your states equivalent especially with no stop auto pay. Or have enough change and dollar bills to quickly pay the tolls. Even one vehicle without one, holds everyone back. Having a line of vehicles pulling to the side of the road or slowing down so the delayed one catch up, is not the safest action to take on the road. But worse, if you drive on, the one without the pass may try speeding to catch up. Not cool or safe! Arrive alive! Another plus for an I-Pass subscriber are that charges are normally half the posted toll. If you're headed east, EZ-Pass honors I-Pass subscribers. Toll roads are more common as you go east. West of the Mississippi, they're pretty few and far between.
- We have each of the drivers pay for their own fuel while on the trip. They hold their receipts until we get home, then cash out with the Troop Treasurer after we get back. As a group, the drivers discuss which gas brands they prefer, but we also figure out a backup in case things change on the road.

- We let the boys bring their game players. Just don't remind them about extra batteries and car chargers. (*Ours run low on power before the state line – They start getting bored for a little while, then the magic starts, they started talking – to each other!*)
- Some of the vehicles are equipped with DVD players – I believe the boys miss some of the best parts of the trip if they're watching movies all day. (Couch potatoes!!) Conversation, joking around, travel games and sightseeing build memories. I had one group write, act and videotaped their skit on the road – It was great at their Eagle Ceremony receptions. Engage the car in conversation – it's worth every minute of it!
- For overnight accommodations, we try to use different council scout camps and military bases along the route. Inexpensive, new experiences, and accommodating. Tent sites are the norm but scout huts, gym floors, and barracks have also been offered and used. Hot showers and flushers are a great way to end the day and start fresh for a new day on the road.
- Call the local council offices along the route to get some ideas from the locals as to camping and food. Some Harley Davidson dealerships offer camp facilities. Call them, you'll be happy you did. Don't forget the local and state parks, that's why the local council will normally know what works best in their area.
- Remember, to leave it better than you found it! There may be other units wanting to follow in your footsteps! It's Scouting's reputation you are responsible for – Keep it a good one!
- We order pizza and local fare for supper. If we are on a military base, try the base dining facility. Keep it quick and filling. We've even trekked into the food courts of local mall - normally a fair selection. Back at the campsite, let the boys run around, play some games, light a camp fire, watch the sunset and talk about the trip so far and what the next day may offer. Plenty of time to wash pots and dishes at camp.
- We use IHOP, Cracker Barrel or local fare for breakfast. Most locals love to share their favorite breakfast spot (and stories) with scouts and leaders. We gather in the parking lot; discuss how to order, meal cost, taxes and the art of tipping. (*Surprising how many of even the older scouts had never ordered their own meals!*) I then give each scout and leader a \$20 bill and remind them that this covers both breakfast and lunch. I've talked with waitresses afterwards and they normally don't mind being a part of this life lesson, especially if the boys/leaders tip well.
- If flatlanders are headed for mountains, get the boys and leaders to start drinking water days before the trip starts. No sodas, no caffeine drinks, and no coffee. It helps them acclimatize quicker to the altitude affects when you get there. On our first trip, our older scouts didn't think this applied to them and spent Monday and part of Tuesday feeling the effects. Found that Pepto-Bismol works wonders.
- If a military base is one of your stops, remember the security and access requirements are ever changing and can differ from base to base. Check with them before you leave so you are not denied access at the gate. While onboard, see if you can utilize the base dining facilities. You will need a roster of the adults and scouts for each meal. Contact the facilities managers ahead of time to ensure they can accommodate you. It works best if you have a retired or active duty military member in your unit to talk to them beforehand – they speak the lingo!
- Do NOT leave smellables in the vehicle when you get to camp. Try to reduce them as best you can. We either eat it or throw it out. A bear can peel a car door open just to get to an apple core or bag of chips. You want to make the trip memorable, but this is one I can live without it.
- Pack some Sickness Bags (1/2 gal or 1 gal ziplock bags with a paper towel in the bottom.) We stuff them in the seat backs or side storage. Extras bags don't weigh much. We've had some of our iron-stomached scouts get sick about an hour after breakfast, these bags came in mighty handy.

Remember, the whole trip is a life-lesson, not just the summer camp part. The shared experiences, laughter, difficulties, work-arounds, the new sights and travelling with friends gives us memories worth keeping.