

Camp Falling Rock

by Dwight 'Aby' Johnson (2005)

Licking County Boy Scouts have long enjoyed one of the finest camping facilities in the United States. Camp Falling Rock is located twelve miles northeast of Newark, Ohio in Mary Ann and Eden Townships. Today it consists of nearly five hundred fifty acres. It has been a Boy Scout Camp since 1926. Before it was a Boy Scout Camp, it was a church camp in the 1880's.

Earlier still, it was a Native American camp on the north extension of the Shawnee Trace. This important route led to and from the Flint Ridge area. Five hundred years ago the land was covered with high canopy trees and the forest floor was relatively uncluttered. The Native American traveled the ridges, avoiding the brush and brambles in the valleys. Two "trail marker" trees existed on the ridge until the 1980's. These were red oaks, tied in position as pointers when very young. They grew in a strained and distinctive manner and were readily recognized. There was also a fire circle on the north end of the camp. The markers are gone, but old timers remember them.

The camp is located in the U.S. Military Lands, which were set aside by Congress in 1786 to pay Revolutionary War soldiers for their service to country. The lands were roughly surveyed and characteristic monuments set at important section corners. The Military Lands Act was modified and clarified twenty-three times between 1786 and 1803. During a 1958 physical survey of the lands, three of these original marker stones were "found" on the perimeter. These stones were set prior to 1803, the last year Congress authorized payments for surveys!

The name "Falling Rock" comes from the original road into the camp. A rock overhung the road, and appeared ready to fall onto the road. That portion of Rocky Fork Road is now closed, but the hanging rock is still in place.

Licking County Boy Scouts were first organized in 1919 with the forming of Licking County Council. The first land purchase at Falling Rock was in 1926. During that and the following year, incidental camping happened at the site.

There was also an active program to construct a dining hall and barracks buildings. The camp was opened in 1928 for two sessions of two weeks each. Cost was \$10.00 for the session. It is interesting to note that camping was over before the August "polio danger." Later on in its history, local Girl Scouts used the camp during August. Apparently, girls were less susceptible to polio than boys.

The original camp was located on thirty-four acres now called "Lower Camp, or "Winter Camp." Access was via a ford of Rocky Fork Creek. The Scouts' first structure was a "Monkey" bridge. This was replaced with a swinging footbridge that accommodated visitors. In 1931, the Licking County Commissioners built a bridge across Rocky Fork to provide traffic access.

The bridge had a checkered past, but is of historic significance. The bridge, known as Bridge 411, Doc Brown's Bridge, also bears the designation of Historic American Engineering Record

(HAER) OH-89. It is one of three surviving cast iron post truss bridges in the United States. The other two are located in Lowell, Mass. Cleveland Bridge Company was the probable builder, circa 1872. It is presently closed to traffic, and it needs major repairs before returning to service. Funding is the common deterrent.

Another significant bridge exists on the camp. The covered bridge that formerly spanned Rocky Fork Creek near Houdeshell Road was replaced in the 1970's with the current model. The covered bridge was moved to Camp Falling Rock. Necessary timbers were replaced, and the bridge was erected as a memorial to Harold G. Hayes, longtime Scout Executive. The work was completed and the bridge stands today as it was built in 1872!

Boy Scouts have an affinity for all water except bath water. The original "swimming hole" at Falling Rock was upstream of Mr. Sam Hilleary's millpond dam on Rocky Fork Creek. Each year the boys would add ties to the top of the dam to deepen Rocky Fork for aquatics. Unfortunately, the dam washed out in 1935 and aquatics took a hiatus.

A swimming pool was built at the camp in time for the 1938 camping season. It was intended for stouthearted lads that knew how to swim. It was spring-fed and shaded. The water was cold and murky! The shallow end was five feet deep and the deep end was eleven feet deep, but a lot of boys learned to swim in this facility. By 1950 the pool was inadequate. It took thirty years to replace the original pool, but through the efforts of the community and the generosity of a Scouting family, the Willard E. Shrider Memorial Pool was built on upper camp. It was dedicated in 1980 as one of the finest facilities of its type in the country. An adjunct aquatics program was the Sea Scout Ship started in the 1930's under the tutelage of Mr. Max Slaughter. The Sea Scouts received used power poles from Ohio Power, formed them into a raft and floated and swam them to Scout Island (also known as Charleston Island) at Buckeye Lake. A cabin and two Adirondack shelters were built on the island. The Sea Scout Ship disbanded in 1950 and the State of Ohio declared primacy over Ohio Canal lands in the 1960's. With that, the Scout Island chapter was closed.

Spectacular rock formations and waterfalls are part of the natural beauty of Camp Falling Rock. The woods have been impacted by the chestnut blight (1904), Dutch elm disease (1930's to present), a tornado (1996), gypsy moths (2000) and a severe ice storm (2004). We are holding our collective breath that a control measure for emerald ash borer will be found before it reaches our camp.

Whitetail deer returned to the area in the 1950's. There are bobcats on the premises. Wild turkeys abound. An ardent "birder" can see more than one hundred species of birds on the camp in a season. The oldest building on camp is called the Assistant Rangers Cabin. It is located on lower camp, and the core building is a log cabin built of chestnut logs. The hand-hewn joists are fitted with mortise and tenon joints. The cabin has been added to and modernized, but the core building dates from about 1840.

The next oldest building is the kitchen wing of Scoutmaster's Cabin. This was the headquarters for the Mt. Vernon church group that conducted camp meetings at "Camp Whip-Poor-Will"

during the 1880's. We believe this building was built in 1883. It is in very poor condition, having been twice moved. It is slated for replacement.

The first buildings of the Boy Scouts were erected in 1927. These consisted of five barracks buildings and a dining hall. Generally, they followed the layout of First World War training center facilities. The dining hall was replaced by Franklin Lodge in 1937. Four of the barracks buildings were torn down or moved and subsequently fell down. One of them remains in place. For many years it was the camp first aid station. Today it serves as the "Boat House."

Franklin Lodge was the dining hall and center of camp from 1937 until the new dining hall was built in 1957. Franklin Lodge is named for Rev. L.P. Franklin, first Scoutmaster and first Commissioner of the Licking County Council, Boy Scouts of America. Rev. Franklin was the Rector of the Trinity Episcopal Church in Newark until 1926.

The period 1949 to 1973 was characterized by expansion of acreage and facilities at Camp Falling Rock. Licking County Scouts enjoyed a vigorous camping experience at Falling Rock, as well as active participation in Scout Jamborees and trips to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico.

The local Kiwanis Club donated a building that became the new trading post and craft center. The Krebs family donated a rifle range facility and a cabin in memory of Betty (Mrs. Al) Krebs.

Scouting suffered a downturn in the late 1970's in an experiment to "modernize" the program. After a very few years, the core values were restored, the program reinvigorated, and Scouting started on a path of growth again.

In the interim, much of the local support was lost, and the camp became an expensive, under-used facility.

In 1987, Licking County Council was absorbed into Central Ohio Council. This lasted a few years until Central Ohio Council became the core of Simon Kenton Council, serving south central Ohio and northern Kentucky.

With this expansion, the dining hall was updated to handle four hundred boys per week. A year-round cabin in memory of Herman Bauman, long-time Scout Executive, was built. A new maintenance facility and storage building were built adjacent to a new ranger's lodge. Lake Pee Wee was expanded to its present size. Generous gifts from the Licking County Foundation and American Electric Power made a climbing tower and COPE course a reality in 2002. A new Nature Center was added in 2003.

Current projects for the camp include the replacement of Sequoia Lodge winter cabin by the Eagle Scouts of Licking County. The new lodge will be called Sequoia Eagle Lodge, and is presently in the final stages of obtaining permits. A year-round shower house is in the planning stage. Relocation and updating of the utility grid and development of two remote camps (outposts) on the acreage are underway.

For nearly eighty years Camp Falling Rock has served the youth of the area. Plans to enhance, preserve and expand the facility are constantly evolving. A core of dedicated volunteers spends hundreds of hours, and many of their own dollars, constructing and maintaining the infrastructure. Recently, they created The Rock Foundation, an IRS-listed charitable foundation to fund the emergency repair and planned construction projects for Camp Falling Rock.