



ST. MARK'S WILDERNESS PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Purpose and Philosophy:

The Wilderness Program's primary goal is to help our boys develop character, community, and stewardship through outdoor experiences. We believe that confronting some basic problems of life in the wilderness, under the guidance of skilled and caring adults, helps our students cope with uncertainty, gain self-confidence, and develop self-reliance. To that end, the Wilderness Program teaches essential wilderness skills and strengthens a boy's ability to organize and to lead others. We believe that being together in the outdoors gives teachers and students an opportunity to interact in a way not possible at 10600 Preston Road, and we believe these experiences help to unify our school and teach us the importance of working together and caring for one another. We believe that boys need an appreciation for nature and an understanding of its delicate balance. They need the opportunity to see themselves as part of the cycle of nature and to discover meaning and contentment in a simpler, humbler existence. We believe that tomorrow's leaders must accept the challenge to bear their share of responsibility as stewards of the Earth. Finally, we believe that the life of every boy should include the fun of camping and cooking and living in the freedom of the outdoors, and that every store of childhood memories should be rich in the recall of days in the open and nights under the stars.



6th Grade Campout: Beginning in the sixth grade and continuing through the summer before their freshman year, all Marksmen are required to participate in the Wilderness Program. For this campout, students travel to Mill Creek Farm, located approximately two hours east of Dallas on the shores of a beautiful lake, Mill Creek Farm. The property is privately-owned and has established campsites, hiking trails, basic bathroom facilities, and an amphitheater. Through a variety of outdoor activities, our boys experience a pristine section of the bottomland hardwood forest native to East Texas. This campout introduces the boys to the equipment and group dynamics they will need on the upcoming middle school backpacking trips and eventually the big Pecos trip. The boys camp in groups of 8-9 boys and rotate through a series of scheduled activities, including knot tying, shelter construction, orienteering, and fishing. Each group cooks its own meals and spend the night in its own campsite.

7th Grade Campout: For this campout, all seventh-grade students travel to the Cross Timbers Trail on the south shore of Lake Texoma, approximately 90 minutes north of Dallas. This campout introduces the boys to the equipment and group dynamics they will eventually need on the Pecos trip. Like the 8th Grade Campout and the Pecos, the 7th Grade Campout is a backpacking trip. The boys carry all of their personal and group equipment, food, and water in backpacks designed for that purpose. Each group will hike a 3-5 mile route and spend the night in separate "primitive" campsites (no bathroom facilities, no electricity, no potable water). The boys learn how to build shelters, make fires, treat water, cook meals, follow Leave No Trace wilderness ethics, and-



everyone's favorite-go to the bathroom in the woods. The terrain is varied and challenging, ranging from scenic strolls along the shore to short, steep climbs through the hilly hardwood forests common to North Texas.

8th Grade Campout: This campout is similarly structured to the 7th grade campout. All eighth-grade students travel to the Cross Timbers Trail on the south shore of Lake Texoma. However, unlike the two-day, one-night duration of the seventh-grade campout, the eight-grade campout is incrementally longer, being a three-day, two-night excursion, and will prepare the boys for the upcoming Pecos trip.

The Pecos trip: For fifty-one years, all rising freshmen at St. Mark's School of Texas have begun their Upper School careers by tackling the challenges of an eight-day, seven-night backpacking trip in the Pecos Wilderness of New Mexico. Approximately



25 miles northeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico and nestled in the heart of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the Pecos "high country" is a stunning setting. Each group route varies, but the average daily hike ranges between 5 and 8 miles in length. The typical group will have at least five hiking days, and it is common for groups to spend multiple nights in one or two campsites. Activities on the Pecos trip vary from group to group, depending on which route the group takes. Most groups however, experience day hikes, general exploration, and fishing. At some point during the trip, each boy completes a 24-hour "Solo". With the guidance of leaders and within shouting distance of camp, boys construct a shelter and spend a day alone with his thoughts and the Pecos Wilderness. "The Pecos," as it is affectionately known, is a unique experience, one of the school's most honored traditions.

Conference Details: We look forward to the opportunity to describe our school's Wilderness Program in greater depth at the upcoming IBSC Conference hosted at St. Mark's School of Texas. Our workshop, "Hiking Woodland Paths and Crossing Streams: An Outdoors Approach to Education" will be hosted during Block 3 which will take place on Tuesday, June 28 at 8:30 AM in Centennial 119. We look forward to meeting you there!

Cameron Hillier
Director of the Wilderness Program
Hillierc@smtexas.org
214-883-0088

Eric Slingerland
Assistant Director of the Wilderness Program
Slingerlande@smtexas.org
214-346-8342