

A Day in the Navy

The earthy shades of freshly fallen leaves blanketed the dewy carpet of grass in a vibrant mosaic of color, crackling under my feet as I continued my trek to Bessey Hall. The bright blue sky was nearly cloudless on this lovely October day, and I sensed that I would be experiencing its splendor to the fullest by taking part in the Skunk River Navy.

I felt great anticipation as I was greeted by several dozen faces upon entering into room 112 of Bessey. There was such a wide variety of individuals gathered together, and although everyone had different backgrounds and expectations about what was to come on this voyage, they were all united to accomplish one common goal. It was not long before our group of about fifty individuals set out on what would be the third Skunk River Navy of the season.

After making our way to the starting point on the Squaw Creek, my comrades began entering into the river. I stood near the water's edge as I contemplated when I would take the plunge. It was time. I watched my tennis shoe disappear beneath the surface as I took my first step. Instantaneously, I could feel the chilly waters penetrate the fabric of my shoe, sending a shock through my body. I had literally only just gotten my feet wet.

It was not long before we found garbage to be removed. Early on in our journey, an old tire was found buried in the earth along the edge of the water. With a team effort, it was hauled out from the dirt. I was astounded by how deep it was buried in the soil! I could only imagine how long it had been buried there, and it startled me to of how much longer it may have remained there had we not removed it.

We trudged on through the water, covering a three and a half mile stretch of the river. We found an old water heater, two plastic lawn chairs, a football, a traffic cone, and an old blanket in addition to several cans and bottles. It was startling to find so many unnatural items

that had been dumped into the river. It is difficult to comprehend what drives people to taint such a beautiful environment such as this one.

Though the weather was perfect and the area surrounding the river was lovely, I soon became weary of our task. I was both mentally and physically exhausted from our journey, but I continually reminded myself that my efforts would make a real difference in the end.

Finally, after several hours and several pounds of garbage retrieved from the river, we had reached the finishing point of our journey. After banking the canoes, we proceeded to create a human chain to transport the garbage. This was indeed the most powerful part of our voyage for me. It was so incredible to see how all of our hard work had paid off, and I felt completely united with the group as we passed the garbage bags from person to person. The feeling was almost indescribable. After transferring all of the trash to the dumpster, we piled back into the vans. We were cold, we were wet, we were dirty, and we were exhausted, but somehow, we were all empowered by our experience.

Though the journey was tremendously long and difficult, I look back and realize that my participation in the Skunk River Navy awakened me in a way that I had never experienced before. The Earth is truly a beautiful and wondrous place, and it can be ours to explore and enjoy for as long as we can maintain its splendor. Though saving the world sounds like a daunting task, when every individual does their part, there is no telling what humanity may be able to accomplish.