

Return to Huntington Lake, California
July 8-10, 2005
By Ralph Stevens

The Stevens Family enjoyed camping under the stars at Huntington Lake again this year. All family members attended including Brian Behrendt, our soon-to-be new son-in-law when he and our daughter, Kelle, get married September 3, 2005.

Son Scott made the long drive from Carlsbad, CA to attend for the first time and expressed interest in repeating the camping experience again in 2006.

His 14-hour round trip and high gas costs would seem to encourage a longer trip than only two nights but anything longer needs dedicated planning. Hopefully, his vacation time will be allocated to allow that to happen next year. Bard Johnson and Wes Harrison were, once again, our gracious hosts with their camping experience and identical sail boats. Unfortunately, we missed visiting



with Flo Harrison (his wife) and their grand daughter, Taylour, who were there the week earlier. We also missed Bard's daughter Jenny, her daughter Casey and two sons Matthew and Harrison by just a few hours. Since all family members expressed



interest in camping together, plans to coincide our vacations next year is high on the priority list. Bard Johnson and his long-time friend Wes Harrison always share interesting stories of large family gatherings in past years and an attempt will be made for the newer generation to experience the camping trip that includes, camp site layout, tent assembly, meal preparations, camp fires, sailing, hiking, pine cone and driftwood gathering, fire side chats, roasting marshmallows and smores, singing and story telling. Oh yes, bear sightings, ants, deer, eagles, heavy rain and snow are occasional experiences also. Naturally, good camping begins with knowing how to erect tents of all kinds. During this trip, several high tech persons attempted, but failed, to erect Scott's unique little hiking tent. I'd used the strange tent during my 18,000 mile motorcycle tour of the USA (1994-1996) but didn't remember any problems. I probably read the instruction manual (now misplaced).

FRIDAY JULY 8-Our 12:10PM planned departure from Kelle and Brian's house in San Jose was only 10 minutes off the mark but it easily provided time to get to our rendezvous point at Clovis Community Hospital located a few miles east of Fresno where we met Scott. He traveled 5 hours to get to the 168/N. Temperance Ave. intersection and we traveled there in three hours including a 20 minute error when I missed the turn off of Highway 99. I'd forgotten that you must turn east on route 180 to reach 168, the route to Huntington Lake, but it's not marked as such when traveling southbound on 99.

We pre-arranged to meet at the Hospital then caravan the final 1.5 - 2 hours up the mountain. The new hospital had a cool lobby, a small cafeteria and clean restrooms so it may

become a future meeting place. We drove the final miles of winding road (somewhat uncomfortable for side-seated passengers)



and eventually arrived at Huntington lake's Rancheria Campground at 4:45PM ---on schedule.

Bard then prepared a great spaghetti, sausage & salad dinner while we set up our tents and leveled the camper van. It soon became obvious that no one had a clue about properly erecting Scott's small hiking tent but, somehow, it finally popped into shape. Brian, Kelle and Zachary had a

larger, conventional design, tent and except for Zachary tripping over a tie-down rope, all went well. Air mattresses were inflated and tested with sleeping bags on top.



After a good dinner, clean up and roasting smores around the camp fire, our family crawled into the comfy confines of tents while Sandy and I did our best to get comfortable on the pull-out couch in the camper van. More thought needs to be applied in regards to sleeping comfortably in the van or I may be a lonely camper on future trips.

SATURDAY JULY 9-At 6:45 AM, Zachary was pounding on the camper van door indicating that he was ready to start the day of activities. I managed to activate the vehicle alarm twice before properly opening the door. The many campers in the area realized it was time to give up trying to sleep any longer.

Breakfast was pancakes, bacon, ham, cantaloupe, cereal, juice, coffee and milk. We attempted hot chocolate but threw it away due to its extreme old age.

A quick walk to the ranger station was next and we were officially registered. The camping area was large enough for two vehicles and was \$10 a night but *if two vehicles were actually parked*, it was \$20—a very strange pricing policy. Our group discussed the next meal (a common event) and it was decided that we would have lunch at a restaurant at the far end of the lake. Sandy and I drove



the van and met the group who had sailed there in Bard's and Wes's boats. After lunch, we changed who sailed and who would drive

back to the camp site.

Weather could not have been better at the 7,000 foot elevation lake and sun block was in demand. I elected to sail back and Scott drove the camper van back to the campsite with Sandy, Kelle and Zachary. Sail boat races were still in progress but Wes and I and Bard and Brian managed to stay clear and not interfere with the wind or whatever else is critical in sailboat racing.

The second night was the Stevens Family turn to cook dinner (yes, time to eat again). Pre-prepared pot roast from Harris Ranch was such a winner last year, we did it again and have probably established a traditional meal for future years. Dinner included the heated up roast with boiled noodles, small carrots, some left over wine from the previous meal, salad, and French bread. Oh yes, the traditional ice cream was served for desert. I've been taking ice cream since my first trip four years ago because it's a reliable tell-tale indicator of my refrigerator functioning property. If the ice cream becomes soft, I need to re-level the van or check the power or gas supply.

The van did experience some loss of 12 volt power that was indicated by low light level at night time. Upon investigation after returning from the trip (with the help of Brian's electrical expertise), a dead battery cell was discovered. The 6-year guaranteed battery lasted only

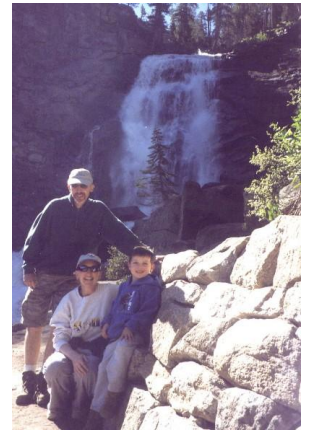
14-months which is a sad testimony of costly high quality products and long-term guarantees.

More smores and stories around the warm campfire followed the dinner clean up. Several adjustments were made for bedtime when Scott added another blanket and Zachary requested to sleep in the camper van because he got cold sleeping in the tent the first night. He occupied the rear bed nicely and Sandy and I adjusted to the pull out couch as before.

SUNDAY JULY 10- The morning started early as the day before and breakfast was nearly the same also. The activity agenda was limited due to our decision to return to San Jose early and beat the Sunday evening crowd.

We had time to visit the Rancheria Falls that were spectacular this year because of plentiful rainfall during the winter. The hike up the mountain was fairly steep the first half mile and finally leveled near the falls. I was very thankful to reach that level ground.

Brian and Sandy elected to stay at the campsite and prepare items for departure that was scheduled for 10 AM. Wes was still on his sail boat so he missed the final photo and farewells at the campsite. Bard and Wes planned to stay one more night and return the next day. They would perform



extensive tear-down of the campsite and prepare the sail boats for travel--such work that we knew very little about. Upon return, Bard noted that Wes had a tire blowout on the way back that caused some concern and delay but not enough to stop them from returning for another week of sailing a month later.



The Stevens family enjoyed the short vacation and look forward to having more camping trips at beautiful Huntington Lake in the coming years.