

THE OUTSIDER

## Doing it My Way

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*The Register-Guard*

Published: Thursday, August 17, 2006

I had to forgive Art Pope for dancing around the minefield of logistics as he tried to pave the way for me to spend a day working with one of the Northwest Youth Corps crews.

Pope, NYC executive director, has escorted more than a few media types out to his crews over the years, so he has an idea how things usually work.

"I'd like to get going early," he said, testing the waters, "like maybe 7:30 or so? That way we can drive up there, find the crew, and you can spend some time with them on the trail."

What time do they start working? I asked.

"Well, when it's really hot, they get out and start about 6 to avoid the heat. They'll probably be getting up and getting going sometime about then," he said.

Well, I'd like to be there about 6 then, I said.

He laughed. "Well, then we're talking about leaving around 4 a.m. or so ..."

OK, I said, that's fine with me.

There was a long pause.

Listen, Art, I said, I want to experience what the kids are experiencing. I'm not coming out to do your typical story. I'm coming out work a day with a crew, and I want to do it right.

"That's great," he said, a bit confused since, he admitted, he has never had anyone approach it quite like this. "Why don't you tell me how you want to do it."

I took a deep breath and felt like I was on the wall of rocks over Wildwood Falls again. I might live to regret this. It won't be easy on me. But this is what I want. I want to do it right.

Here's the deal, I said, I work until midnight. What I'd like to do is drive out there to the camp and sleep in the back of my truck for a few hours, then get up with them and see what it's like from the start.

"You want to sleep in your truck?" Art said, sounding stunned.

Yeah, I said. They're sleeping in a tent and then putting in a full day's work. It's not fair if I'm sleeping in my bed.

“And you want to do a full day’s work?” he asked.

Yeah, I’m not coming there to interview the kids or you or team leaders, I said, I’m there to work.

We agreed to meet at the camp at 6 a.m., since Art wasn’t sure if he wanted to come out the night before, or the next morning.

For me there was little choice. I could go home after work and try to fall asleep for a few hours. But I know that getting up at 4 a.m. is no treat. So I preferred to ride the adrenalin rush of putting out the sports section the night of a major track meet in Eugene all the way out to the camp, or close.

It was after 1:30 a.m. when I finally rolled beneath the train trestle east of Oakridge and found Eagle Creek Road. I hit the gravel and began the climb, beneath the light of the full moon.

I was pretty bushed by that point so I kept my focus completely on the road. I came sweeping around a nice little turn, and the moonlight lit up the wooded mountain side, that tumbled far below toward the valley. Whoa!

I downshifted and slowed my ascent. I had to drive eight miles in to find them. I didn’t want to drive up to their camp at 2 a.m. and freak anyone out. So I found a pullover spot about a mile down the road.

I climbed in back, rolled into my sleeping back about 2:30, and crashed. At 5:30, I got up and began my day. I wasn’t sure if they were going to be ready to work at 6, or starting breakfast, so I scarfed down some food and went for it.

As I was preparing to head up, I saw Art’s Explorer drive past. I met up with him a few minutes later.

“It appears they’re still asleep,” Art said. “I’ll go roust them.”

Whoa, hang on there, I said, if they’re starting later today, that’s fine with me. I’ll take a few more minutes of shuteye.

Besides, I thought, that’s a great way to start a day. Hey, everyone, this is Raz. He’s the reason you’re up early today. Everyone say hi and thank your lucky stars that Raz is here.

I don’t remember everything about early adolescence, but I do remember one thing. You don’t want to toy around with sleep deprivation at that age.

So, we hung out in at camp. They found a wonderful spot on the shores of a perfect pond. Idyllic.

First Kate, the crew chief, awoke. Then Colin, the assistant crew chief. Kate started warming water and the griddle. Tanger and Twitch were up next, along with Leila.

The girls get up first, Kate explained, because they actually like to make breakfast. In the blink of an eye, we were on a roll.

NOTE: Check back Friday for the next installment.

