Year 7 Camp

I could start with a quote—but that might cure insomnia; or I could simply begin with a roll-book statistic for the Friday following the camp—16 students were present and 10 were absent. Exhausted, happy, liberated, asleep, still in the shower—the explanations are extensive but they point to a full and challenging experience in the alternative Monarto of Old Watulunga. The Year 7 camp is as tried and tested as the guru, Iain Langusch, himself but, due to Iain suffering an old combat wound, Duncan Falconer took on this role with the style and zest normally reserved for prize-winning citrus.

Students farewelled their pets, parents and iPods under the watchful and wise gaze of RSL koalas and set off with almost tangible excitement to a world beyond the confines of the city. Horseshoe Bay at Port Elliot provided a popular start to the camp as they set about sand sculptures, swimming and sports, and the unleashing of extraordinary energy. Days two and three are the main activity days at Year 7 camp: archery (where students aim for caricatured images of various staff), orienteering, ropes courses, raft building, kayaking (yes, there is water but more from Queensland is always welcome) and gardening/cooking. The latter culminates in conjuring up pumpkin soup sourced from the sustainable oasis of the organic garden at Old Watulunga. These days are busy and invigorating and enable the students to find out a few things about themselves and each other. True colours are on display at an early stage! The first night under canvas is always an ‘interesting’ one. While some students slumbered with somnolent ease, others had the look of traumatised miners emerging from a pit shaft—or perhaps just sleep-deprived teenagers wrestling with remote-control separation anxiety.

Year 7 students Rafting at Old Watulunga

Year 7 Students Laura and William on the wire

Fun is at the core of the camp and Duncan kept his charges invigorated with his wit and wisdom. The evening’s entertainment ranged from one session of ‘Night Games’ to the ‘Skit Night’, where students surprised the group with their range of eclectic talents.

Fun and food seem to go well together and any suggestions of a boot camp need to be dismissed. While the frenzy of excitement as the doughnuts arrived on Wednesday might have been slightly alarming, the interest in culinary fare continued—ranging from ‘spectroscopic’ filled sandwiches to McWatulunga burgers, spaghetti bolognese and roast chicken. Any student looking to pursue a career in politics would be wise to make secure any photos of the final dinner, where garbage bags were fashioned into various forms of dress.

On day four the ebullient Year 7s left the birdsong of Old Watulunga for the Agapanthus Reserve of Greenhills Adventure Park at the curiously typographic Victor Harbor. Water slides, mini golf (it still ruins a good walk), paddle boats and other activities were seized upon with infectious enthusiasm. The Year 7 camps have many facets to them. Technology is left behind and Students are encouraged to use their initiative and imagination while tackling challenging tasks and social situations. They have the chance to socialise with their new classmates, and Staff can get to know the Students in a different setting. The first year in the Middle School can be daunting, yet a week at Old Watulunga can provide self-knowledge and a pulse of confidence for the days ahead.

My sincere thanks go to the upbeat and positive approach of the Students, since they will always set the tone for such experiences. The tutors, overseas assistants, Old Scholars and instructors provided expertise, humour and tremendous energy, and I am very grateful to them. A final bugle blast for the king of scouts, Duncan Falconer, for his organisation and exceptional ability to relate to both Students and Staff. We salute you! Now for that elusive quote: ‘The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.’ (Marcel Proust)

Tom Heffer
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