

San Jose Mercury News:

For 75 years, Camp Hi-Sierra has given South Bay scouts an outdoor adventure

New features at the former logging camp include an observatory and rebuilt rifle range



Camp Hi-Sierra, a former logging camp east of Sonora owned by the Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council of Scouting America, celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2024. (Sal Pizarro/Bay Area News Group)



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This summer marked a milestone for Camp Hi-Sierra, a rustic former logging camp east of Sonora that has provided outdoor adventures for more than 55,000 Scouts from Santa Clara County over the decades.

The Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council of Scouting America, which purchased 100 acres of the property from owner Ed Jenness for the kingly sum of \$10 in 1949, marked the occasion with a reunion event in June and the ribbon-cutting of a new rifle range in July.

“This is our 75th anniversary here at Hi-Sierra which has been very exciting,” Camp Director Bruce Lee said, noting that more than 200 people attended the anniversary event, including staff from the 1950s through the ’80s. “It was really cool to see what these young Scouts who were staffing here in those years are doing today.”

Scouts practice their archery skills on the range at Camp Hi-Sierra, a former logging camp east of Sonora, on July 8, 2024. The camp, owned by the Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council of Scouting America, celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2024. (Sal Pizarro/Bay Area News Group)

The camp has evolved with the times, which is admittedly a very Silicon Valley thing. The Scouts — both boys and girls nowadays — sleep in old Army-green canvas tents, gather around campfires and swim in the icy cold water of the Tuolumne River, but they also learn to make pottery, design games, weld metal and rappel down a 50-foot climbing tower.

A four-year program, the Saga of Hi-Sierra, encourages return trips as Scouts — and adult leaders — achieve awards for taking part in conservation and camp maintenance programs, as well as learning new skills and, well, showering now and then. If you're wondering, I don't have lifelong memories of Camp Hi-Sierra myself, but I went up for a week both this July and last summer with my son's troop.

Michael Wilson, deputy scout executive with the Silicon Valley Monterey Bay Council, said the camp began a transformation about a decade ago thanks to successful fundraising efforts to replace old buildings and add new ones.

"We've taken to heart that our camp was 'lovingly consumed,' as Phil Boyce from the Valley Foundation would say, and we've tried to take a small bite of that every year," Wilson said. "Every year, we're doing something new."

That's included a new dining hall, staff cabins, the climbing tower, an archery range and the new rifle range.

In July, Council Scout Executive Eric Tarbox was joined by donors Pepper Snyder and Gary Robinson, along with board members Mark Lazzarini and Todd Trezell, to dedicate the new rifle range, which had been heavily damaged by heavy snowfall. A "cowboy action" shooting range was named after Snyder, the Sprig Electric founder who was [the honoree at the council's Distinguished Citizen Party](#) held at Levi's Stadium.

The rifle range itself has been named for Campbell native John Stephenson, who has been the range instructor since 1981. Stephenson, who was visibly moved by seeing his name on the new facility, says he first shot a firearm at Camp Hi-Sierra when he was a Scout in 1971 and takes his responsibility with shooting sports very seriously.

"The most important thing we teach up here is safety," he said. "I don't care if they can name the parts of a gun, if they remember those safety rules the rest of their lives, we've been a success in this program."

And the camp's evolution isn't over yet. A new observatory was under construction this summer and families got their first look at it during a Labor Day weekend camp.

"It's been a very busy year of getting things done," Lee said.