

Frequently Asked Questions:

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Why Crowell Hilaka? Aren't there plenty of other camps in the area?

Crowell Hilaka is a unique blend of grandeur, history, natural beauty, and security. To top it off, James Kirby's marvelous inventions on site are beautiful examples of problem-solving through innovative technology.

What inventions? The dance floor built on railcar springs, the patented Clearwater lake, the millwheel mounted on ball bearings to produce hydroelectric power with only a trickle of water, - and more!

What beauty & grandeur? The camp is largely hills, ravines, and rock outcroppings which make for spectacular scenery and challenging terrain for hikes. The two lakes are fed by numerous rocky creeks meandering through mature beech-maple forest.

What do you mean by security? The entire double camp is enclosed and gated. It discourages accidental intrusions, and makes it hard for lost campers to wander outside the boundaries.

What's the historic part? There are six large buildings dating from the 1920's. Three are extensive houses, replete with turrets, gables, nooks and crannies common to the architecture used by the wealthy of the era for their county retreats. There's also the Coach House, the old dance hall, and the Mill - once Kirby's workshop, now a museum of Girl Scout history.

So – aren't those historic houses expensive to maintain?

I've been a troop leader for about 30 years. Countless times I've watched a young girl's first arrival at one of the mansions. Her eyes get big as she looks around. "Who *owns* this?" she whispers in awe. I tell her, "You do". She doesn't believe me, so I explain that it was bought a long time ago by Girl Scouts, for Girl Scouts, and cookie sales ever since that have paid for the upkeep. She gets it. *It really is hers!* For the rest of the weekend, she is a princess. A princess with chores and responsibilities, but a princess, no less. For a girl whose family can't afford a big house or fancy vacations, this is nothing less than sheer magic.

The money needed to keep that magic for so many girls is worth every cent.

**Crowell Hilaka is less than 10 miles from Camp Ledgewood.
Do Girl Scouts really need two camps so close together?**

Before the recent merger of Girl Scout councils, Ledgewood was Akron's main camp; Crowell Hilaka was the main camp for the Cleveland area. It's just an accident of history that they happen to be so close. Now that we are part of the same council, both camps serve all the girls. They are conveniently located in the center of the highest population corridor between these two urban areas. Think of them as two lenses in one pair of glasses.

Since the camps have very different characters, it may be possible to develop each according to its unique strengths. For example, since Ledgewood has a functioning pool and climbing rocks, it may play up athletics. Crowell Hilaka already has a strong infrastructure to support programming in arts & sciences. They could complement each other.

What about the report that Crowell / Hilaka is underutilized?

Although the usage data are not available to us at this time, several troop leaders in the North Region (the former Lake Erie council) have reported being unable to reserve preferred campsites this past year because they were already booked.

There was not enough space this past spring (2009) to accommodate all the service units that wanted to plan campouts.

In addition, we are losing the nearby Camp Jessie Mae in Ravenna – which was mostly used by former Western Reserve troops. Wintergreen cabin is going, Bedford cabin is already gone. We are going to have trouble accommodating everyone who wants to camp

GSNEO only plans to close Crowell/Hilaka temporarily. Is that such a problem?

Yes. It is.

First, without a camp manager on site, the risk of vandalism increases. In addition, damage to buildings from animals or storms will go unnoticed for longer periods of time. Any water or wildlife getting into the buildings in winter will become increasingly destructive the longer it is left on its own.

Second, when processes are put in place to close a camp down, it takes that much more energy to bring it back into operational condition. There would be a great temptation to leave it dormant. As historian & novelist James Michener said, "There is nothing as permanent as a temporary solution".

Third, Loss of access equates to loss of unique programming. Girls and former girls have said over and over how much this place means to them, even without

elaborately orchestrated programs. Childhood is so short; every good thing that we have for our children and grandchildren should be used and cherished. This camp is one of those treasures of childhood. Even temporary closure is immeasurable loss because those years of childhood will never come again.

When an organization cuts essential programs and services to save money, it creates a downward spiral. Loss of program leads to loss of interest and goodwill, which leads to a declining membership, which leads to yet a smaller budget, which leads to more cuts – until there is nothing left.

In the greater Cleveland area, Camp Crowell Hilaka is a keystone element of Girl Scouting. If it is lost, you may as well kiss everything else goodbye.

Do girls want to camp anymore?

The 2001 Windward study commissioned by GSLEC showed the activities preferred by Girl Scouts ages 12 & up (the former Cadette and Senior levels) were “being with friends”, “trips” and “outdoor activities such as camping and hiking”. These three were far out ahead of any other activity choices listed in the study.

The first Cadette / Senior Summit was held at Camp Crowell Hilaka in 2003. Even though it was held in April, and the date announced only three months in advance, the event filled to capacity and beyond. The second year the waiting list was even longer. The program was nothing more than traditional, Girl Scout camping with a twist of independence – and girls were hungry for it.

State and National parks are packed. Their problem is over-use, not under use.

If that’s the case, why aren’t more Girl Scout troops camping?

Computer glitches in the camp registration process since the merger made it very difficult for leaders to even access campsite information. In some cases, the system indicated sites were filled when they were really still available! This has recently been resolved.

On a large scale, the national organization has been working toward making Girl Scouting a very multi-faceted program with the primary emphasis on girl leadership. Therefore, it has de-emphasized outdoor programming. Without that program direction, girls will choose to do the things they are already familiar with.

The Friends of Crowell Hilaka believe that troops should be encouraged to camp. It is well known that people are very influenced by other people. We hope to become one positive influence towards girls using outdoor resources, especially the incredible resource of Crowell Hilaka.

Why should girls camp? “Camping” as defined by Girl Scouts can mean many different things, from primitive ground tents to luxury mansions. The defining characteristics are that it’s an overnight experience, planned by the girls, where the girls are responsible for the chores and some of the program. It’s about personal challenge and stepping outside the routine more than “roughing it”. At camp, even Brownies take beginning roles in leadership as they learn skills and help their friends.

So it doesn’t have to be outside? No, some of the best camps are indoors in winter. But when camp is in an outdoor setting, it opens a whole new dimension. “Nature” and “environment” are not exotic locations. They are they are the basic realities of the world we live in. Learning how to be comfortable and have fun outside makes girls stronger.

What does Friends of Crowell Hilaka do? Our first priority is to get the word out about the planned closure, and about how much of a loss it would be if it happened. We want to partner with GSNEO to bring Crowell Hilaka up to American Camping Association standards; to use our collective Girl Scouting and professional experience to help design and implement innovative programming at camp for girls. We want to assure that the camp experience is available and accessible to all girls who want it.

How Can Girls Help?

- Go camping, and bring your friends!
- Write a letter to the GSNEO office. Tell why camping at Crowell Hilaka is important to you. The board of directors needs to hear from **girls** that camps ARE worth keeping, and it is the voices of girls, more than anything, that will make the difference.

If you want to post your letter or camp stories on the FoCH website, www.friendsofcrowellhilaka.org; e-mail it to our Minister of Magic interrobang@yahoo.com. Include your name/ city / troop number / age level (we will only post first name and troop number) . We are also accepting any camp-related art (written - like poetry, stories, memories - or pictures drawn, painted, or photographed) to go on the web

To learn about service opportunities as they open up - Join the FoCH e-mail group – You can set it for special announcements only. Encourage parents and grandparents to do the same.