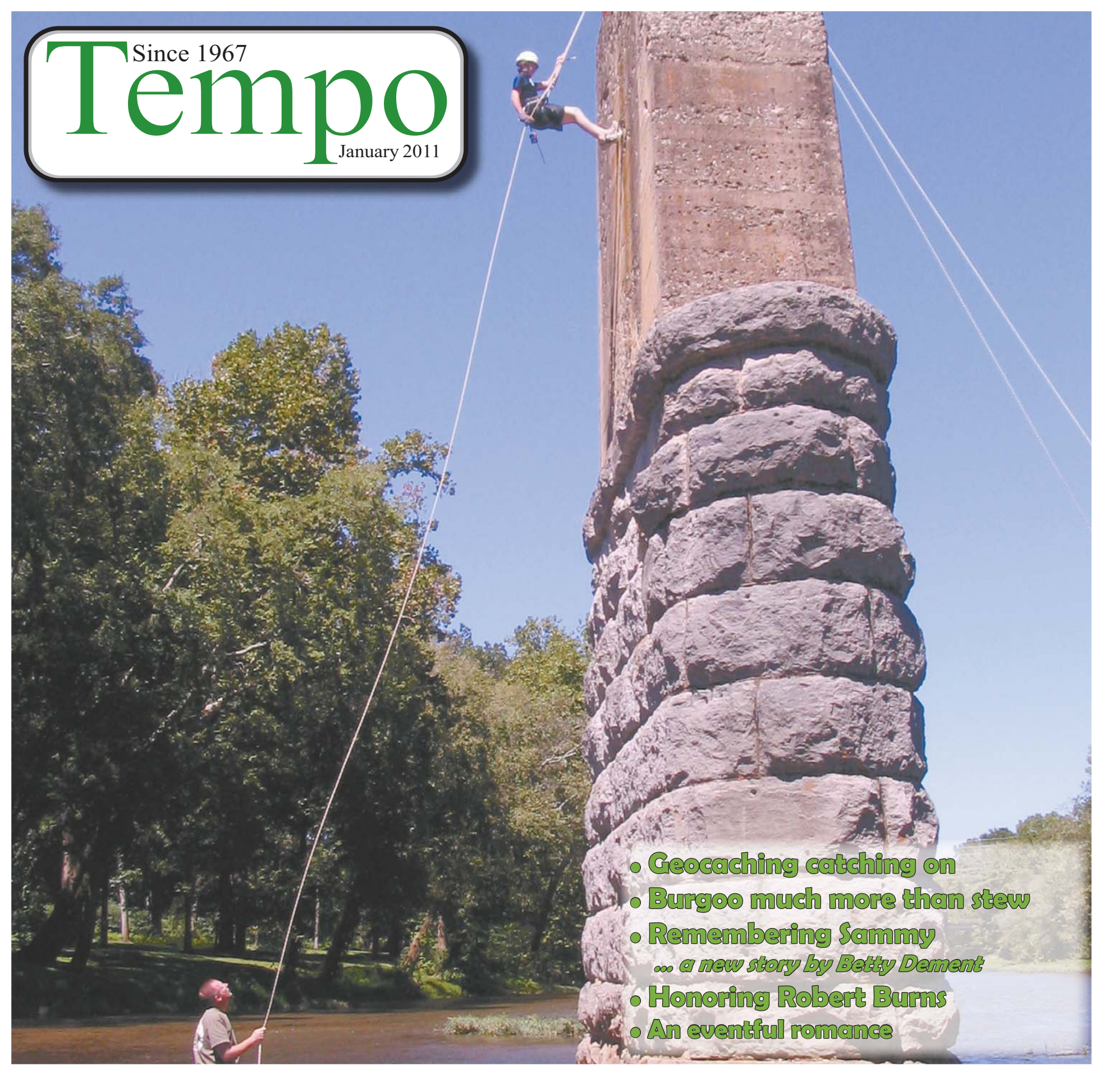


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Geocaching game can lure

By TOM GILLARD

Geocaching. Members of Tullahoma Boy Scout Troop 402 and Venturing Crew 1111 had heard about that game for years, but participating in it had been modest at best.

To join in the worldwide game of hide and seek (there are an estimated five to six million geocachers on the planet) the players must have access to a GPS device.

GPS, or global positioning system, is an amazing piece of technology, a product of the age of electronics and satellites.

The basic idea of geocaching, using a GPS, is to locate “treasure” in a hidden container, or cache, and then go online and share the experience with other geocachers.

The GPS is the key to success, having the capacity via latitude and longitude to find something within six to 12 feet of its location anywhere on this earth.

When the Boy Scouts of America started its “Get in the Game” program, the Scouts started getting excited again about geocaching. In fact, Troop 402 members were the first in the Elk River BSA District to complete the “Adventure of Scouting” series and start on the “Cache to Eagle” list.

This story starts about eight months ago when troop leader Ray Young was searching Geocaching.com and found a list of extreme caches.

He located one that was nearby and started reading the description. The warnings associated with this cache were ominous and took up most of the page. He showed what he

had found to the other troop leaders and Scouts, and we decided right then that we had to get this cache.

Safety was their primary consideration for obtaining their goal, which was to locate the cache, sign the log, and return it to its hiding place for someone else to find.

Detailed planning and practice were crucial because this cache is located on top of a 45-foot-high abandoned railroad pier in the middle of the Flint River in North Alabama.

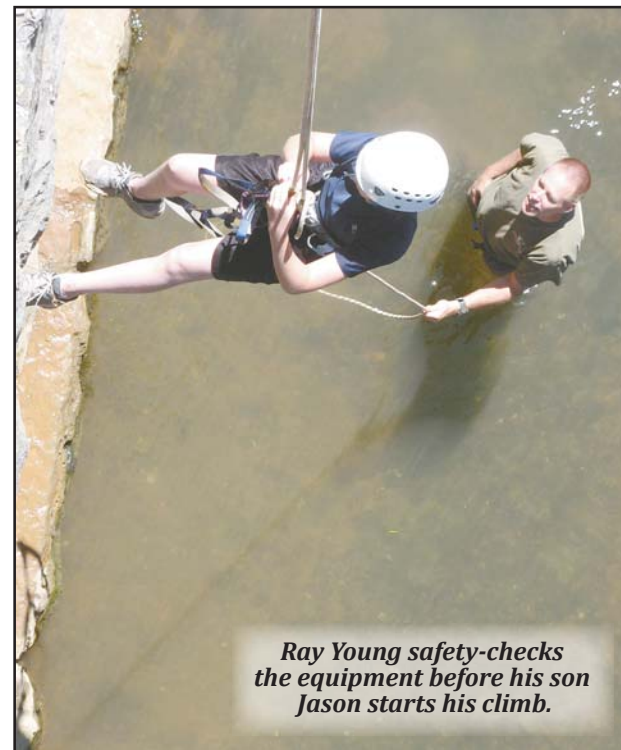
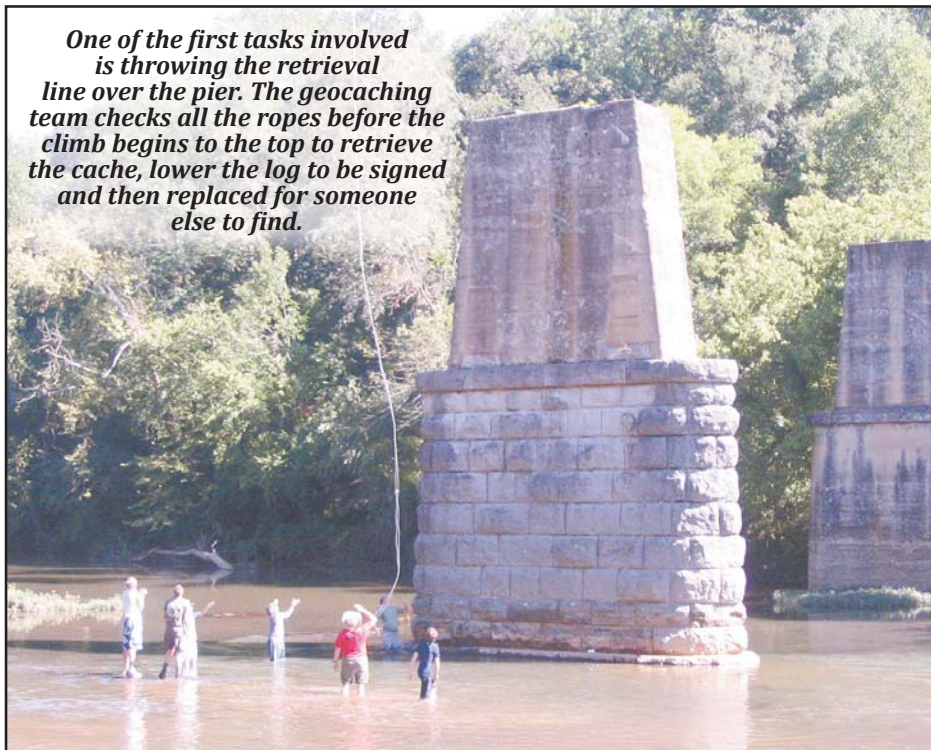
Since climbing a rope (usefully referred to as “jugging”) and rappelling were involved, Venturing Crew 1111 was invited to participate. Bob Forde, Venture Crew 1111 adviser, is BSA climbing and rappelling certified.

Jackson Petty and Jason Young were picked as the



The old N.C. & St. L. trestle creates a picturesque landmark scene on the Flint River in North Alabama.

One of the first tasks involved is throwing the retrieval line over the pier. The geocaching team checks all the ropes before the climb begins to the top to retrieve the cache, lower the log to be signed and then replaced for someone else to find.



Ray Young safety-checks the equipment before his son Jason starts his climb.

players to very lofty places

Scouts who would make the climb, mostly because they had their own equipment and had been ascending and rappelling out of trees in their back yards for years.

After the initial planning was complete, a practice day was set to validate their approach. This included tossing a small line over something as high as the objective, us-

ing that line to pull the climb and belay ropes over, and practicing anchor and rescue techniques.

The Tullahoma High School band tower proved to be the ideal structure to perfect their technique.

Once the “dress rehearsal” was completed and all were comfortable with their duties, they set the date to

make the attempt — Labor Day weekend.

The day finally arrived and they loaded their vehicles with four Scouts, six adults and lots of equipment, and headed off.

As with many geocaches, some hiking is involved. In this case, the pier is about a quarter mile downriver from the parking location. They

found the parking spot, unloaded the climbing gear and started walking along the bank of the Flint River. Fortunately, there had not been a lot of rain in the previous weeks, and the river was fairly low.

Once at the pier, each team member set about preparing for the ascent. Since there is no place in the middle of a river to anchor the climb rope, three people had been assigned for this task. In addition to the “anchor,” a belay person was positioned on one side of the pier, and another safety person on the climb/rappel side of the pier.

The first challenge was to get the thin pull line over the pier. That was when the first

obstacle was encountered. The friction between the pier and the string would not allow the line to slide freely down over the other side as it had during practice. This problem was quickly overcome by adding more weight to the line and trying again. The climb and belay ropes were then tied onto the thin line and pulled over the top.

Now came the “easy” part. The two Scouts clipped in and started their ascent. Once both were on top, the cache box was located, then lowered for everyone to sign the logbook.

Jackson thought ahead and had carried an American flag up the pier with him. Pictures were taken, and the

two climbers rappelled back down into the river.

The entire process took about three hours.

We could have done it faster, but it wouldn't have been as much fun. This cache makes the standard “park and grab” caches pretty boring.”

This was a very challenging scouting activity, but, with proper planning, proved to be a safe and very exciting event for the Scouts. Troop 402 and Venturing Crew 1111 are now looking for their next extreme geocache.

Team members were Ray Young and Bob Forde, safety and experience; Jerry Noe, Rob Forde and Tyler Storz, anchors; Jackson Petty and Jason Young, climbers, and

Adding a patriotic touch, an American flag is displayed from the top of the pier by Jackson and Jason.



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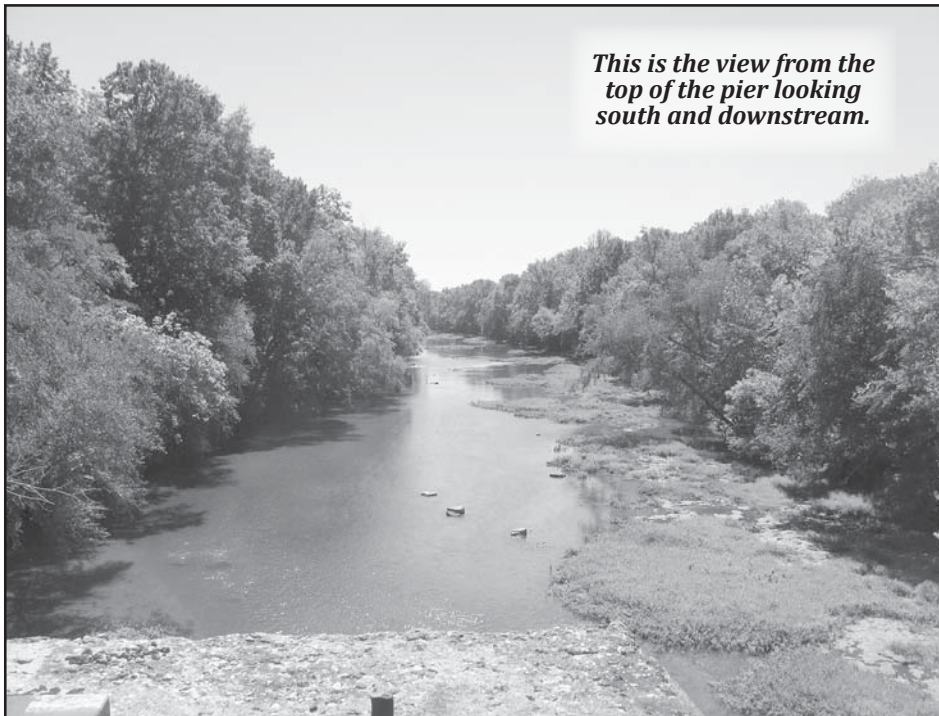
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This is the view from the top of the pier looking south and downstream.

John Petty, James Russell and myself, general support and support and photographers.

To see more pictures of this event, log on to Geocaching.com, and search for Cache GCW40T – Flint River Crossing on the NC&StL.

For those who have not started geocaching yet, why not give it a try? There are hundreds of caches nearby. An environmental plus goes along with the hunt if players will follow the lead of the Scouts and carry a plastic bag for trash pickup.

Another positive thing: it's an excellent way to get Scouts (and anyone else interested) into the outdoors if only for a couple of hours on the weekends or in the evenings. We have even done a night caching run which put a new twist on things.

And for Scouts, the new Geocaching Merit Badge has just been released. So go out and "Get in the Game!" ■

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Tom Gillard is scoutmaster of Tullahoma Boy Scout Troop 402.)



Jason makes his descent under his dad's watchful eye.

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