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Dr Robert James "Doc" Van Patter (1934-2007)*



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Dr Robert James "Doc" Van Patter

(1934-2007)

He was called **RJ** and **Jim**, but if you were one of the hundreds of Scouts who came to know this man, you knew him simply as "Doc."

I first met **Doc** at the 1973 *Bu alo River Explorer Scout Canoe Race*. It was my first canoe race, and the canoe I sat in and the paddle I used were both provided by **Doc**. He seemed to be everywhere that weekend. He organized the race, provided nearly all the equipment for the teams, brought most of the participants, and he paddled in the race.

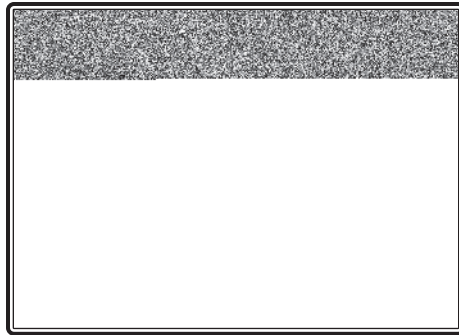
His energy level never dropped, and I couldn't say the same for myself. I was hooked on canoe racing after that weekend and have been involved in the sport ever since. Three Russellville Explorer Scouts in that race 34 years ago are now advisors for Venture Crew 300, a coed scouting unit that focuses on canoeing and kayaking.

Doc was a man of many talents. He was a swimmer, paddler, scuba diver, pilot, cook, outdoorsman, and of course an innovative practicing veterinarian. **Doc** didn't just do things half-way either. He once broke a world record in a freestyle swimming event while at Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State).

As a competitive paddler, he never lost a men's aluminum class event and he raced competitively into his late 50s. Most of the time he was competing against men half his age. He was bow hunting before it became fashionable and hunted with the great **Ben Pearson**.

He served as the Little Rock (AR) Zoo's veterinarian while he operated his own private practice, Cantrell Animal Clinic. He was the secretary/treasurer of the Arkansas Veterinary Medical Examining Board for 10 years, and was named *Arkansas Veterinarian of the Year*.

Doc's greatest impact, however, was on Scouting. He was one of the early founders of the *White River Canoe Race*, one of the premier Scouting events in the USA. Much of the great success the race enjoyed in the 1970s can be attributed to his efforts. As the advisor of Post 8 in Little



Rock, he traveled all over the country pulling his ten canoe trailer behind his Dodge truck to places like the *Nantahala River* in North Carolina and the *Snake River* in Idaho. There probably were not too many streams in Arkansas that he and his Scouts didn't float or race on. When his group showed up for a race, you had a big event and competition to boot.

Although our Explorer Post 300 from Russellville was normally competing against his Scouts, **Doc** would be the first to offer assistance or equipment. After racing in the *Des Plaines River Canoe Race* in Illinois in the early 1970s, **Doc** bought the first racing canoes that came to Arkansas, a selection of prettily colored Sawyer Champion 1s.

Doc operated an outdoor store, Canoe-land, out of the basement of Cantrell Animal Clinic. The canoe shop became so popular in canoe and kayak circles that he had to sell it because it had gotten too big to manage by a solo veterinary practitioner.

In 1973, **Doc** received the *Silver Beaver Award*, Scouting's highest service award for adult leaders.

In 2002, at the *White River Canoe Race*, a tribute was held for **Doc**, and he was presented with an award for his founding the race and his many years of unselfish service to Scouting. Scouts with ties to the race traveled as far as New Mexico and Virginia and told stories about the race, their experiences, and about **Doc**.

Because of Alzheimer's disease in his last 7 years of life, **Doc** did not get to see the resurgence of the *White River Canoe Race*. Because of his influence on Scouts and on others, you can rest assured that we will continue to build the *White River Canoe Race* into one of the greatest Scouting events in the country.

We will miss you, **Doc**.

—Stephen Lynn

United States Canoe Association

..... Gareth Stevens

USCA is a national association of adult and youth whose common interest is competition paddling (mostly marathon distances).

It also promotes river conservation and good river stewardship, cruising and camping, paddling for people with disabilities, and camaraderie.

Every year in early to mid August it holds a large *Canoe & Kayak Championship* (covering sprint, marathon, orienteering, and outrigger for paddlers with disabilities), and at different times of the year, a separate *Stock Aluminum Canoe Marathon Championship*.

For more information:

www.uscanoe.com

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www.uscanoenews.com

The article about **Dr Roberts James "Doc" Van Patter** appears on this web site courtesy of Stephen Lynn, *Canoe News*, and the *United States Canoe Association*.