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FEATURED

Visitors navigate long journeys to reach Gillette for Camporee

By JAKE GOODRICK NEWS RECORD WRITER jgoodrick@gillettenewsrecord.net

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People set up campsites at Cam-plex on Monday in Gillette as thousands arrive from around the world to attend the Internet News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

Tapiwa Mkungunugwa arrived in Gillette about halfway through his month of travel in the United States.

Standing outside of Morningside Park at Cam-plex, the 42-year-old from Zimbabwe and his son, Kupakwashe, 11, are two of about 300 people from the landlocked country in southeast Africa expected in Gillette this week.

And they're two of nearly 4,000 people arriving from long journeys that emphasize the first descriptor of the International Pathfinder Camporee.

The atmosphere was frenetic as most of the roughly 48,000 people who checked in to the International Pathfinder Camporee at Cam-plex on Monday — the vast majority of the 60,000 visitors expected in Gillette this week — set up camp in the hot sun with blowing winds.



The Bramalea Fil-Can Pathfinder club works to secure sun shades and tents after several flew away at Cam-plex on Monday in Gillette as thousands arrive from around the world to attend the International Pathfinder Camporee.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

Most journeyed from within the continental United States, but many others traversed time zones and borders to make their way to Gillette.

“We are trying to see as much of America as we can before we go back home,” Mkungunugwa said.

His journey started more than two weeks ago when he flew from Zimbabwe to Dubai. From there, he traveled to Miami, took a bus to Orlando then flew to Michigan. After spending time in Michigan, including a nice potluck and sermon at Troy Seventh-day Adventist Church, he flew to Denver then drove up to Gillette.



Cars are seen with window painting as people set up campsites at Cam-plex on Monday in Gillette as thousands arrive from around the world to attend the International Pathfinder Camporee.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

Nathalie Nieto, 19, traveled more or less by herself to the last Camporee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in 2019. This time, she arrived in Gillette with her immediate family.

“The first time my mom wasn’t able to come,” Nieto said. “She was like, ‘OK, I don’t want you to miss this opportunity, this is once in a lifetime.’”

Her enthusiasm showed that it really was, and now she’s here with her mom Elaine Torres, and stepdad Carlos Irizarry. Her two brothers, 14-year-old twins Carlos and Derek Irizarry, are roughly the age she was at the last Camporee.

“I got to meet to many people all over the world and each one of them welcomed me like I was part of their family,” she said. “I ended up making so many friends, lifetime friends, whom I still talk to today.”



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News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

To get to Gillette, her group of 11 flew into Las Vegas before embarking on a five-day road trip to see the country, passing through Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado on their way into Wyoming.

Traveling from Florida doesn't have the same border and passport stipulations faced by international attendees, but it's not a short trip to Gillette, either.

Guy Dormeus, 47, arrived in Gillette late Monday afternoon with his group of 23 from the Tallahassee Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church after about 36 hours of travel.

The group left Tallahassee, Florida, at 4:30 a.m. Sunday, flew to Charlotte, then Denver, and caught a bus together up to Gillette. They had to ship many of their camping items, and basically all nonessentials, ahead of time, which added to the logistics and expense.

"A lot of work, a lot of work," he said.



Emergency personnel respond to a heat-related emergency as people work to set up campsites at Cam-plex on Monday in Gillette as thousands arrive from around the world to attend the International Pathfinder Camporee.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

Like many of the groups, fundraising efforts and help from their church covered a lot of the expenses for each person.

“It’s a big deal, big effort from the church, from the members to help us out, so we can afford the cost of it,” he said. “It would be super expensive.”

Jacksonville Southpoint Seventh-day Adventist Church, another church from Florida, sent a group of 23 to Gillette. Several of them sat on a ledge outside the Wyoming Center on Monday while their group was registered inside. Despite the relative heat for many in town, the Floridians were wearing long sleeves and sweaters.

Jaden Barrett, 17, is attending his second Camporee, after visiting Oshkosh. He had never heard of Gillette before learning it would host this year's event.

“For me, it's been pretty cool,” he said about seeing this part of the country. “A lot of mountains. A lot of mountains.”



A group from the Potomac Conference set up campsites at Cam-plex on Monday in Gillette as thousands arrive from around the world to attend the International Pathfinder Camporee.

News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

The group flew into Bozeman, Montana, on Sunday and drove into Gillette on Monday for check-in.

Alexis Caines, 17, said that her mom, Ann, is the church youth director and helped coordinate the travel plans.

“She didn't want to drive because last time driving was chaotic for the church,” she said.

Also with the group is Nate Houston, 43, who is attending Camporee for the second time, and the first time in 35 years, when he was 8 years old.

“This is my first year coming back,” he said. “It was in Pennsylvania. I was too young to remember the city.”



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News Record Photo/Luke Johnson

That was the event’s second iteration and took place in Mount Union, Pennsylvania, according to the Camporee website. That gathering brought about 12,000 people, or a fifth of the group expected to show this year in Gillette.

Houston is here with his son, Jaiden, who’s 15 and attending his first Camporee.

Memories fade over the course of more than three decades, but what stood out to Houston most was the evening performance.

The show now takes place on a massive stage, with intricate audio and video coordination and years of planning. Back then the performance was less involved, but clearly still memorable.

“I remember that was very, very impactful,” Houston said. “I remember that still, from when I was 8. That’s the part I remember most.”

Jake Goodrick