

Waterbearing As I See It

Disclaimer: *These viewpoints are my own, based on observation and experience, and are not those of my Province, my Kingdom, or any officers or officials thereof. They aren't designed to supplement, replace, or bypass any stated policy of the SCA. They're just **my** opinions and viewpoints.* – Zubeydah Jamilla al-Badawiyah (2004)

Perhaps because I see waterbearing as a joy and an honor, rather than a duty, it has always been extremely fun for me. When I offer a combatant something to drink, I let them know through my expression and tone of voice that I am proud of their efforts, that I am encouraging them to strengthen themselves so that they are able to continue their valor upon the field. As they drink, I inquire if they need food, and I also let them know that should they experience any problems with their armor, that a repair kit is available. I assure them that whatever they need, the waterbearers are ready to provide it. As they depart, I bid them to fight well for the honor of their kingdom. I have seen men return to the field with their shoulders squared, rather than slumped, after just a few seconds of attention, encouragement and praise.

In my naivete, I thought that waterbearing was waterbearing was waterbearing. Not so. Waterbearing is often a juggling act between waitress, mother, nag, school nurse, and cheerleader. Each fighter looks at the waterbearer in a different light and his viewpoint changes depending on the type of event that is being held.

I - Event Types:

A. **Wars:** My first couple waterbearing experiences were at Estrella War 2000 and 2003. Both were amazing. Beverage and food supplies were always ready when we came back for refills. Food was plentiful, and varied. I learned more in 2003 under the guidance of Her Excellency Dovita, who explained WHY the fighters needed each type of food served, and what physical symptoms could give hints on what I could recommend to the combatants. For example: "My Lord... Your skin is pale and pinched. You are low on salts and protein, and are overheating. (Pointing) There is a food station only twenty steps Right Over There. (Pointing Again) Please, refresh yourself. It only takes a moment, and you'll fight the better for it." Given this information, more often than not, they would pause, mumble thanks, and stagger off to get something to nibble on. If I could tell a combatant, "Good, you've gotten some water. Now eat this stick of celery - it will help bind the water in your system so you don't just sweat it right back out" I was more likely to be able to get some small amount of calories and sustenance into them. Cherry tomatoes were recommended for fighters with an obviously gritty or pasty mouth, to cleanse and refresh them. Pickles and olives were the item of choice for others, who wanted the brine to go with their Gatorade (often referred to as "yak piss"). A mantra I used repeatedly was, "The army that hydrates is the army that wins."

At wars, the fighters *know* they need hydration, and will usually drink up while at the 'resurrection point.' The biggest challenge is getting liquids to those who don't die, and stay out on the field. This requires being ready at a moment's notice to bolt out with full watering supplies to the middle points of the field that don't get to take advantage of precious water breaks. This is a task best suited to the nimble and quick footed. Dashing out with supplies and getting back out of the way just as the hold is lifted by the marshals is exhilarating.

If a fighter at the resurrection point refuses to drink, and I see them come back in a few minutes later and still not drink, I have dashed over, saying, 'My Lord Sir - Dehydration is a more deadly enemy than (Kingdom X). Please... have you had just a sip or two?' (Taking into account they may be getting hydration elsewhere) This simple but effective reminder will sometimes break them out of 'fighter focus' and get them to hydrate themselves.

B. **Tournament Events:** Convincing the fighters to stop and drink during tournament style events is often a Herculean task. The fighters are driven, focused, and in a 'sprint' rather than a 'marathon' mindset. More often than not, it is only through determined, gentle reminders that they will stop and drink. If there's an entry point to the field, I recommend stationing yourself by the list mistress and/or marshals - though not so close as to be in the way - and offer water to everyone who approaches to enter the field, as well as the event staff. Heralds, Marshals, and List Mistresses are not immune from the momentum of the combat; they, too, forget to drink.

Food is much less of an issue at Tournament events. Having fruits for sugar, pickles for salts, cheese for protein and fats, and anything else your budget permits, on hand is always a good idea. Foods should be kept cool so as not to wilt and become unappetizing. Let the fighters know what is available, remind them a few times, or circulate once or twice with food on a tray, and leave it at that. The combatants likely won't eat until they are disqualified, or there is a specific, long-duration break in the fighting. In this case, it's still more likely that each will have their own household supporting them.

At Tournaments, something else that's very helpful to have is a large 5-gallon bucket filled with ice water, containing clean, bleached kitchen towels or shop-cloths. The fighters can drape these cloths on their heads or tuck into their gorgets during breaks in the combat. This helps lower their body temperature, which can skyrocket while wearing a helm in the hot summer sun. Some fighters love these to be available. Others find them too cold, and uncomfortable. It's an issue of individual preference. As always, let them know of the availability, remind them every once in a while, and leave it at that.

I like to provide multiple choices for beverages: Gatorade, Ice water, un-iced water, and some variety of lemonade. The waterbearing station serves more than just combatants – passers-by, newcomers, messengers, heralds, marshals - it's a good bet that most of those present at an SCA event probably are not drinking enough. Stationing a cheerful and outgoing individual at the waterbearers point, who welcomes anyone who doesn't move away fast enough to come and refresh themselves is a service to the kingdom, and can be key to the event's success. Snacks can also be available there to help keep staff going.

At an average small-scale (40 fighters, 200 participants total) event, I like to have a waterbearing budget of at least \$50 - \$75. This allows the purchase of: 2 large containers of Gatorade, 5 bags of ice, 10 lbs of oranges, 2 lbs of grapes, 2 gallons of pickles, 2 lbs of cheese, 1 melon, 2 lbs of carrots, 1 lb of celery, the supplies for fighter biscuits (sausage balls), 3 cans of jumbo olives, and the non-reusable items you'll generally need at the station.

C. Weekly Fighter practices: The ice bucket with cloths is a definite must for summer fighter practices. I usually bring a case of refrigerated water bottles, rather than a water cooler with individual cups. The bottles make it easier to keep track of the discards, and a magic marker quickly identifies which bottle belongs to which fighter, in case they aren't consumed in one sitting. The water is kept cold in a cooler chest full of ice. Sport tops allow the fighters to squirt the water into their mouths through their helms, if they don't want to remove their headwear. Keeping the fighters in the habit of drinking from practice to event to wars is a good thing - if it becomes habit, they are more likely to pause and water up during stressful, intense combat sessions.

II. Waterbearing Supplies:

A. For the Field: While one might think the answer is simply a water container, a waterbearer can provide much more. Before attending Estrella 2003, I queried the fighters of my Kingdom as to what were the most vital supplies needed on the battlefield for an armor repair or for comfort, other than a hammer and anvil (which is a bit beyond my ability to carry in a belt-pouch). I received some wonderful answers, and as a result, have created a 'utility belt' that I wear whenever waterbearing at events. It contains:

- 1 belt-slung spray bottle of ice water for misting the faces of combatants (if they wish) through their helms with a 4 foot lanyard attaching it to my belt.
- 1 belt-slung rotary punch that is fully enclosed in a snap-closure heavy leather 'holster'.
- Wide belt pouch containing: a handful of 12" long zip ties, 4 rolls of rawhide leather strips/thongs, 1 roll of 4 foot long parachute cord and another that is 15 feet long, a pair of safety scissors on a lanyard, a bodkin, a pair of needle nosed pliers, safety pins, lengths of pre-cut, pre-punched leather straps, a variety of roller buckles, a variety of rivets, a Sharpie pen
- A roll of heavy duty duct tape (or two - 1 red, 1 silver).
- Wide belt pouch containing: sun block, bug spray, lip balm, saline eye drops, band aids, first aid tape, some throat lozenges, an ace bandage, toilet paper, toilet seat covers, tampons, mercurochrome, antibiotic

ointment, assorted single-doses of pain reliever, several packets of Benadryl or other allergy/sinus medication, a small bottle of hand sanitizer, pen, paper.

- A very small pouch filled with largess items, to give to youth waterbearers.

While this belt arrangement isn't necessarily comely or attractive, its usefulness is undeniable. Being able to whip out a zip tie and give a fighter a strong, temporary fix to a blown rivet and get him back out onto the battle field when he thought he had lost the rest of the day, is a great service to provide. {Please note: a marshal must inspect any armor repair before the fighter can re-enter combat.}

Additionally, I carry two jugs of water with non-contact squirt straws or sport tops in shoulder harnesses, slung bolero style. For clothing, I wear boots that come up to the ankles, and make sure I have a hat on. Garb is cotton or linen, in breathable, comfortable fabrics in styles that are easy to move about in, and don't have dangly parts to get caught on anything. Skirts are kilted up, or replaced with trousers/pantaloons.

B. For the Waterbearer Station: I look at the general local event Waterbearing Station itself as part Hospitality Tent, part soup kitchen, and part command post. The physical site usually also includes the Chirurgeon's setup which adds to the mix. A couple of folding chairs and a table make this area much more comfortable, and if you can convince people to stow their gear somewhere else OTHER than your waterbearer station, it will be much less chaotic and cluttered for the waterbearers as well as those we serve. It also looks much nicer!

Once the tent/pavilion, table and chairs are up, I first get a trash bag lashed or secured to a tent pole. It will be put into use immediately, and keeping the area clean is vital. Hand sanitizer gets applied to everyone within a 10-foot radius. (Said only somewhat tongue in cheek)

Your first needs are water, water, and more water. I recommend two 5-gallon coolers of ice water, 1 of non-iced water, and 1 of Gatorade, if you have the luxury of that many coolers. Once liquids are available, other items can be prepared, depending on the type of event and the season.

Essential Items:

* Sign-In Sheet: This form has columns for Mundane Name, SCA Name, designates if they are a Minor and if so, a space for a signature stating Parental Consent, and a checkbox if they have received training on hygiene and etiquette. This helps keep track of your volunteers for later thank-yous, word fame, and award recommendations.

* Food / Kitchen Supplies: In a large Tupperware tub, I keep the following:

(2) Large Mixing Bowls for Washing/Bleaching
(2) Small to Medium Mixing Bowls
(2) Serving Trays
(2) Chopping knives
Paring knife
Dish Clothes - 1 dozen
Kitchen sponge
Paper Towels
Pastry Bag Tips & Pastry Bags - Disposable - only if serving deviled eggs
(2) Vegetable Peeler
(2) Can Opener
Extra-Long Handled Ladle/Spoon
Mixing Spoons, various sizes
Bleach
2-3 Gallons water for washing/bleaching
(2) Hand Sanitizer
1 Pkg. Disposable Cutting sheets
Box of garbage bags

Box of Zip ties to close trash bags, attach things, general usefulness

PRE-EVENT COOKING PREPARATION

Fighter Biscuits - 2 to 6 dozen
Chocolates - thank you gift for waterbearing staff
Spiced Nuts - thank you gift for waterbearing staff

WATERBEARER KITCHEN PRE-EVENT SHOPPING LIST:

Large, Heavy Duty Garbage Bags
Salt / Pepper
Lemonade Mix
Gatorade Mix
Eggs: 2 Dozen - Mayonnaise / Mustard / Paprika - if serving deviled eggs
Carrots: 4 lbs
Celery: 3 bunches
Cherry Tomatoes : 3 pkgs.
Oranges - 1 to 2 bags
Pickles - spears - 1 to 2 gallons
Pickles - sliced - 1/2 gallon

Raw Nuts: Pecans, Almonds, 1 lb each
Cheese, Cheddar - 3 lbs.
Olives: Large Black
Bleach
Sausage: 2 lbs
Bisquick Mix
Ice: 5 lbs.

Cold Temperatures -
Soup Mix - vegetable broth, chicken broth, or beef broth
Hot Chocolate powder

Not every event needs all these supplies, but it never hurts to have them on hand. No one likes making trips off site to the local grocery-mart.

III. Staffing the Waterbearing Station.

This is a volunteer organization, and as such, no one helping out should feel or be unappreciated and un-thanked. This is especially true at the waterbearing station. Volunteers of any kind are wonderful. Staffing needs fluctuate depending on event size. At one event, I held down the prep table by myself, had two children and two adults as assistants to actually serve the refreshments, and we kept the entire field area watered and taken care of. I've also seen dozens of waterbearers guided by experienced leadership care for 700 battle-weary combatants.

Oftentimes parents will allow their young children to serve as waterbearers. This can be both a blessing and burden. Children often aren't as mindful of sterilization and keeping hands clean and washed, and can sometimes forget that they're waterbearing and become distracted and wander off. Additionally, they need to be reminded more often of keeping the bottles wiped off with bleach, and to sanitize when handling food items. Rather than have the little folks right by the field where they might be tripped over by an overly anxious fighter returning to the field, I recommend asking younglings to serve the list mistresses, heralds, marshals, and nobility, and let someone slightly taller provide service to the fighters themselves. Children do bring a very wonderful, enviable joy to the task however, so I in no means slight their service to the event and the fighters. However, it must be noted that minors are NEVER allowed onto the combat field under any circumstances!!!

While this by no means covers the span and breadth of waterbearing possibilities, it's my own little start. As always, questions, comments, suggestions, and constructive criticism are welcome.

In service,

Zubeydah Jamilla al-Badawiyah

Addendum: This document was written prior to the disbanding of all Kingdom-Sponsored Waterbearing Guilds by the SCA Board of Directors. While the majority of it still holds true from an organizational standpoint, but it does refer to some of the guidelines that were in place in the Kingdom of Ansteorra at the time of its writing in 2004.