

Ready Rangers:
OUTDOOR OBJECTIVES

WHY CAMPING?

BY JOHNNIE BARNES

His bearing was one of authority and sternness. His face was etched with an overly serious frown. With a sigh of controlled tolerance, he folded his hands over his overstuffed pouch and growled; "Why would anyone in his right mind—tramp through the woods, live in a tent, and cook over a fire, when he has a nice home and all the modern conveniences? What value is there in frolicking in the outdoors? Couldn't all that time and energy be better spent in a more practical way? Why all this emphasis on camping anyway?"

WHY INDEED?

For over 100 years wise leaders have proven that camping is one of the most effective methods of training and influencing children and young people. Perceptive churches and religious organizations for many years have realized that camping provides an ideal setting for evangelism, and Christian development. Yet many people, such as the gentleman who asked the opening question, are still asking, "why camping?" For over 20 years I have been trying to answer that question. Here goes again!

DEFINITION

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary states: "A camp is a collection of tents, huts, or other shelters—used for a vacation or outing." That a camper is one who "pitches or prepares a camp." Our concept covers a much broader spectrum. Camp spans from youth and kids camp to a wilderness survival camp—including rough-out camps (living in tents—cooking over fires), church family camp-outs (using a variety of shelters and equipment), backpacking, canoe camping, horseback camping, bike camping, day camps, and other specialized camps.

The format and activities may vary, but each provides a golden opportunity for the alert leader.

A NEW BEGINNING

Camp represents a fresh start for many campers. They begin camp free of past failures, past reputation, or past acts to live down. He may be the kid with the bad grade, the unachiever, the bully, the sissy, the unruly boy, the introvert. He may be the over protected boy, the neglected youth, the smartest student in school, or the kid burdened with demand and expectation beyond his ability.

For a few days, this is all in the past. The slate is clean, he will be judged by his present action—not his past performance. Here is a chance to do new things, make new friends, experience new adventures, demonstrate new abilities and to be on the same level as the other campers. It is like being in a new world. What a golden opportunity to emphasize that this can also be a time to begin a new life in Jesus Christ.

OPPORTUNITY TO ACHIEVE

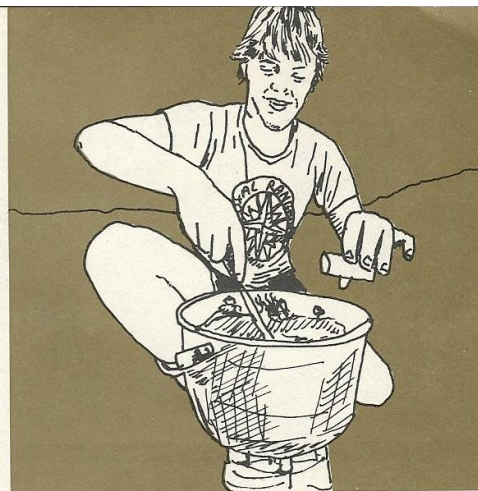
One of the needs of youth is a sense of self-worth. They need the opportunity to achieve something that will give them a sense of importance. During camping many discover they can develop skills, and demonstrate talents yet undiscovered. The boy who thinks he can do nothing right, may discover he is good at fire building or knot tying. The timid boy may "come alive" within his peer group. A nonathletic boy may be a "hit" as a song leader around the campfire. In no other setting are there more opportunities for personal achievement than camping.

With a sense of self-worth, it is much easier for youth to believe that God will forgive and accept them and make something worthwhile out of their lives.

SELF-RELIANCE

Teaching a sense of self-reliance is very valuable in developing character and Christian leadership. A youth who

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learns to climb that mountain, cope with the weather, master these skills, and provide for his own food and shelter, is far better prepared to face the rugged challenges of life.

One young person, after completing a rugged backpacking trip, stated: "When I came I had a problem I thought was almost unbearable. As I faced the challenge of the wilderness, my problem began to shrink in size. Before the trip was over it seemed almost trivial. Now I feel I'm ready to face any of life's problems."

Reynold E. Carlson an outstanding camping authority suggested that each camper should "do some hard things in the woods; get really tired from hiking, go where you need a compass and map, get wet in a rainstorm, go hungry, surmount some real obstacles—climbing, bushwhacking. Find your way through a dark forest. Make a camp, put up a shelter, cook outdoors, get wet and cold in the process but get dry and warm by the open campfire, from wood you have cut yourself.

Such self-reliance experiences will

help forge strong individuals and strong leaders. Many of our youth are soft and pampered. Some will retreat or give up the first time they face a hard task or big problem. Rugged camping experiences can help give them the inner fortitude they need to face life's challenges as a strong, determined Christian.

Camping should be used to build in campers those qualities of reliability, resourcefulness, initiative, teamwork, and Christlikeness so that when God taps them for service, they will eagerly answer, "Here am I, Lord, send me."

CONTACT WITH NATURE

Every young person should have a chance to touch God's natural world—a chance to roam fields, explore woods, wade streams, to feel the sun on his back, the rain in his face, and the wind in his hair. To touch a leaf, to listen to a bird, to smell a blossom, to see a deer disappear in the thicket. To wonder at the stars, to meditate in moonlight, to fall asleep to the sounds of the winds in the trees, a murmuring brook, a crackling fire, a chorus of night creatures, to awaken to singing birds, crisp air, and a

radiant sunrise. To get high on the sights, the sounds, and the smells of nature.

To experience and understand nature helps a young person better understand his role and responsibility in today's world.

It is easy to forget the Source of the necessities of life, and when we forget the Source we began to lose our sense of dependency upon God for providing the basic needs of life.

These experiences will also provide excellent learning opportunities to help campers become increasingly aware of the natural resources God has given them. The leader's task is to take the camper's inherent interest in nature and teach him a sense of dependence upon God who created all things. Being caught up even in the violent side of nature can dispel many unnatural fears.

Because we lived in an area called "tornado alley," my son as a child developed a strong fear of storms—until a certain camp-out.

During the night a turbulent thunderstorm struck our campsite. Together we lashed down the gear, and covered



the firewood as lightning crashed about us and rain lashed our faces. We tightened the tent ropes and drove the pegs deeper. We retreated into our tent and shed our rain gear. My son soon crawled into his warm sleeping bag and lay listening to sounds of the wind shaking our tent. In a few minutes he was sound asleep. That night he lost his fear of storms and I believe many other fears as well.

The camper who is at home in the out-of-doors has little fear of darkness and storms. The individual who has learned to love and understand nature is not likely to become a fear-ridden adult lacking courage for exacting tasks.

A MINIATURE SOCIETY

For a brief period of time, the camp becomes a mini-community. Through controlled activities, and understanding counselors, some of the greatest lessons in Christian living can be taught. Pitching tents, lashing tables, cleaning cabins, and other do-it-together duties is a great classroom for human relations.

Camping gives special opportunity for close personal relationships. Working

together for the comfort and safety of the group reveal their real selves to each other. They are free from complex relationships in which they live, and each is taken at face value.

Living together in the out-of-doors under proper guidance can be democratic living in its highest form. Campers learn the give-and-take of life. They share living quarters, responsibilities, they play and work together, they share experiences, they learn that cooperation, with each camper doing his part, is necessary for a safe, comfortable experience. Faith in the democratic way of life comes through happy, satisfying, personal participation which must begin with campers if we expect them to grow into freedom loving Christians who are willing to sacrifice for Christ and this way of life.

Living together in camping breaks down artificial barriers which may have stood between individuals because of differences in family, economic, or cultural backgrounds.

Camping gives young people the opportunity to work together with others.

Here they must face the consequences of their actions. They assume responsibility for their own needs; they learn to respect the rights and personal belongings of others. Selfishness and greed have no part in a camp. Camping means everyone working together. The person who chisels for selfish reasons finds himself suffering the wrath of his fellow campers. Camping is a unique occasion for adjustments to take place in habits and attitudes which will remain with them through life, and camping helps boys develop a sense of Christian justice and fair play and Christian standards of right and wrong, and gives them opportunities to apply these to life.

RESULTS

Camping can change lives, improve attitudes, strengthen character, sharpen perspectives, and create a new outlook on life. Camping provides a golden opportunity for evangelism and Christian development. Perceptive leaders are utilizing this open door for the benefit of our young people.

With open arms, the hills and forests call to us, "Send me your children. . . ."