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RECREATION CAMPING AND NATURE ACTIVITIES



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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

	<u>PAGE</u>
Purpose of Bulletin . . . . .	1
The Nature Program. . . . .	2
Nature Trails and Hiking . . . . .	5
Day Camps . . . . .	8
Established Camps . . . . .	9

The material in this bulletin, based to a large extent on successful and unsuccessful experience in the field, was collected and edited into its present form by Virgil Dahl, Assistant to the Acting Director of the Recreation Program.

Numerous requests from the field have indicated the necessity for a statement on nature activities and camping. This bulletin is released in answer to those requests and includes the following:

1. A statement on place of nature activities, hiking, day camps and organized camps in the Recreation program.
2. Suggestions drawn from the experience of various states in the operation of these programs.

No attempt is made in this bulletin to outline schedules of activity nor to establish minimum standards for organized camps as these matters appear to be adequately covered by material already produced in the states or otherwise available in printed form. <sup>1/</sup> <sup>2/</sup>

It is hoped that this bulletin will assist project supervisors and leaders in developing a broader program in nature activities, day camps and at established camps:

1. Relating crafts, drama, music, social activities and sports more closely to the basic refreshing patterns of nature.
2. Operating organized camps as to provide each camper maximum opportunity for individual self-expression and development.

<sup>1/</sup> Minimum Standards for Organized Camps. National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C.

<sup>2/</sup> Girl Scout Camps - Administration, Minimum Standards, Waterfront Safety. Girl Scouts, Inc., 570 Lexington Avenue, New York City. 1934.

3. Using day camps to provide natural outdoor experiences for those who for one reason or another are unable to go to a full time camp.
4. Increasing opportunities for low-cost camping experiences for adults of low-income groups residing in cities.

#### The Nature Program

"There are two general uses of nature activities in the Recreation program. First are what we refer to as correlated activities in which the nature subjects are part of some other activity. The second use of nature activities is where the major theme of the activity is the nature subject and other activities are only incidental." 3/ 4/

Hunting, fishing, and gardening, all universal in appeal, typify the best in natural leisure-time pursuits. Physical exercise in most beneficial form, keen nature interests, and strong individual motivation accompany all three. To hunt, to fish or to putter in the garden provides an opportunity for complete absorption and relaxation. So general is the interest in these pursuits that the Recreation leader's function need consist only of organizing service to provide initial stimulation and the opportunity for persons of like interest to get together. By arranging

3/ Nature Activities. Nebraska Work Projects Administration, Union Terminal Warehouse Building, Lincoln, Nebraska.

4/ Five Recreational Roads to Nature Trailing, Iowa Work Projects Administration, Royal Union Life Building, Des Moines, Iowa.

for fly casting facilities, by organizing rifle clubs and fly tying courses, and by stimulating the organization of garden clubs, the Recreation leader immediately assists in solving the leisure problem for many.

To really assist in meeting these leisure problems, the leader's concept of his responsibility must reach into the broad individual interests and beyond the borders of his own community center with its nature museum, and beyond the comparatively small group drawn into his activities at the center. The fine values of such decentralized self-perpetuating activities are clearly indicated in the following obvious benefits of garden groups to the community and to the members themselves. The active garden group can.

1. Stimulate sustained interest in home gardens
2. Assist in the beautification of entrances to the city
3. Assist in the beautification of public grounds throughout the city.
4. Stimulate the establishment of bird sanctuaries
5. Plan and conduct yard and garden contests and clean-up and beautification campaigns.

"The garden club opens the way to an interesting and inexpensive hobby and few activities can provide more real satisfaction."<sup>5/</sup>

So far removed from the natural elements have our living conditions become that many people in large cities are without even the opportunity to enjoy gardens or an open fire except as these opportunities may be presented through

<sup>5/</sup> Garden Club Manual. Iowa Work Projects Administration, Royal Union Life Building, Des Moines, Iowa.

a public Recreation program in a park or picnic area. The change in living conditions from the natural to the artificial has been so sudden that the artificiality of our working and living environment is probably in many ways responsible for the wide-spread nervous and physical disorders with which mankind pays for modern convenience and comfort. To assist in developing and maintaining and balance human organism and to provide opportunities for a life of happiness through association with natural phenomena and enjoyment of the out-of-doors gives us a basis for primary and fine objectives in the Recreation program.

With just a little help people can be stimulated to seek the out-of-doors and to develop a keen interest in the study and development of natural life. Assistance in the organization of garden clubs will reach many, others will be attracted to special events held out-of-doors. For instance, the large crowds attracted to night softball games probably are as much interested in the chance to get outside as they are in following the competition between teams and while it might be preferable to interest them in participating in the activities themselves it should be remembered that interesting such large numbers even as spectators is providing a real service. In the development of individual interests our program planners probably need to reconsider the basic and natural individual interest of people with whom we work.

Only the most elementary stimulation is necessary to interest people in such activities as horseback riding. Most people will provide their own opportunities for riding if given just enough instruction in how to approach, mount and control a horse to overcome their restraint at feeling a dub. The occasional organized nature hike will interest most people in perusing nature areas or nature trails alone, or in small groups, and the less apparent organized leadership is in these forms of interest stimulation the more effective it may prove to be. The over anxiety of a Recreation leader to stimulate people to intense activity or the tendency to overdo group organization may well defeat not only the possible remedial benefits but may tend to deter rather than attract interest. Most people do not like strict schedules and strict discipline in a natural setting is most inappropriate. For many the introduction to nature activities may come only with the provision of an opportunity to sit quietly in a natural environment.

#### Nature Trails and Hiking

Formal nature hikes, while appropriate in some situations, often smack too much of the school room and the mere provision of a nature trail along which people may walk quietly and see for themselves may better meet the situation. Nature trails in the common usage of the term are different

from other hiking trails only in that the especially interesting trees, plants or evidences of wild life are marked with the name, species and sometimes a description of the life of the plants or animals. Markings for nature trails should of course be of a type which will fit in with the natural surroundings and not detract from the beauties of nature itself. Non-corroding natural markers are sometimes used, or descriptive material may be framed and protected by glass or shellac. Rustic benches are usually provided along the trail at points where bird or animal life may best be observed. Grades for nature trails should never be steep, ranging from not more than three to seven percent. Forestry and State Park officials can usually assist in the establishment of nature trails. Hiking trails are plentiful in most woodland areas where they have already been established in connection with fire control and conservation work. In some cases, however, Recreation leaders may to good advantage stimulate interest in the development of trail networks leading from congested areas to major conservation trails or to hook in with such major hiking trails as the Appalachian trail in the East or the John Muir extension in the West.

Hiking clubs are easily organized from groups participating in nature walks under the direction of the nature guide. With some preliminary organization and assistance,



groups make their own plans for future hikes to nearby objectives and points of interest. Such groups will require little immediate leadership if trails are properly marked and full information as to distance, points of interest and necessary conservation precautions are easily available<sup>6/</sup> Annual hikes to major points of interest have been successfully organized for large numbers of people. In Utah thousands participate annually in the hike to Mt. Timpanogas.<sup>7/</sup> Organized and sponsored by the entire community of Provo, Utah, with the cooperation of Brigham Young University, this hike attracts from seven to ten thousand people annually to an evening program in the Theatre of the Pines on the side of Timpagnogas Mountain at an elevation of 8500 feet. After the program, or the next morning, thousands hike higher to Emerald Lake 1500 feet above the theatre, and as many as 1500 have hiked clear to the top of Timpanogas, 11,900 feet above sea level.

Major hikes of this type have also been organized by the Trails Association of Los Angeles County. This Western Association is made up of hiking clubs and publishes

<sup>6/</sup> Hike and Camp Lore. Idaho Work Projects Administration, 400 Capitol Securities Building, Boise, Idaho.

<sup>7/</sup> Department of Physical Education and Recreation, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

its own magazine giving detailed information on interesting hikes in the West.<sup>8/</sup> The Youth Hostel movement is another major organization concerned with stimulating an interest in hiking.<sup>9/</sup>

#### Day Camps

"Day camping combines the idea of the picnic outing and the camp program. It consists simply of an all day outing in a camp environment. The plan does not, of course, give as ideal a situation as the full time camp; but it does offer a way of giving youngsters a taste of camp life at a minimum cost. Summer play programs have been confused with day camp programs, but it would seem that to be called a camp program the fundamental elements of camping should be included; i. e., getting away from the masses of people and the confusion of the city, getting out in the open and the woods and pursuing camp like activities."<sup>10/</sup>

The day camp site should be as removed as possible from evidences of city life but must be easily accessible to the homes of the campers. An ample supply of safe water for drinking,

<sup>8/</sup> TRAILS Magazine, (Monthly). 240 South Broadway, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>9/</sup> American Youth Hostels, Inc. Northfield, Massachusetts.

<sup>10/</sup> Day Camp Counsellors Manual. Department of Recreation, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

culinary and personal cleanliness purposes must be available and the site must be free from unusual or unnecessary hazards. <sup>11/</sup> The site should provide facilities for nature study explorations, handicraft, camp cookery and, if possible, swimming, boating and canoeing. In extreme instances where a park is not readily accessible a vacant lot or even a roof top may suffice for some day camp activities, but it is usually advisable to seek a wooded area.

The short period of the day camp necessitates some advance scheduling of activities especially for art and crafts, music, and drama, but the program should be very informal and allow for a maximum of individual selection and exploration. The camp environment in itself will usually provide a basis for initiating activities and a program based on the camp situation is highly to be preferred over a program transplanted from the playground or community center. <sup>12/</sup>

#### Established Camps

Recreation leaders of the Work Projects Administration are primarily concerned with three types of established

<sup>11/</sup> Refer Page I., Note 2.

<sup>12/</sup> DAY CAMP PATHFINDER, (Monthly). New York City Work Projects Administration, 70 Columbus Avenue, New York City.

**camps:**

1. Camps for underprivileged children
2. Camps in public areas for which advisory Recreation service is requested
3. Camps used for training purposes

In assisting with camps for underprivileged children it is important that the WPA leader assume none of the duties or responsibilities normally belonging to the sponsor or co-sponsors. 13/ To do so not only would lead to misunderstandings as to responsibility for camp operation but would tend to break down community relations. A camp for underprivileged children is normally sponsored by a school department or city council with a number of civic agencies furnishing food, equipment, or transportation. The usual division of responsibility and authority is as follows:

1. The public sponsor or co-sponsor assumes primary responsibility for camp establishment, operation, and maintenance, and handles all funds.
2. The civic agencies working through the public sponsor supplement the budget and work of the public agency.
3. The recreation leader furnishes advisory service and program leadership.

13/ Summer Camps. Georgia Work Projects Administration, 10 Forsyth Street Building, Atlanta, Georgia.

Although the public sponsor is directly responsible for the camp and its conduct, the Recreation leader should be thoroughly familiar with the laws pertaining to camp operation and fully informed on minimum standards for safety. 14/

In the camp program itself the chief concern of supervisors and leaders should be the development of camp practices in line with the better principles of progressive education rather than the highly regimented practices so often used in attempting to maintain camp discipline. It is recommended that all leaders and supervisors familiarize themselves with the newer experiments in camp operation such as that reported by Joshua Lieberman, Director of Pioneer Youth of America and its National Experimental Camp. 15/ This report includes an excellent analysis of the manner in which camp activities may be built on individual interests and gives suggestions for a well integrated program. Uniform hours of rising, retiring, and standard meal hours were found essential in addition to a rest period for children. But such practices as mass calisthenics, rigid activity programs and totally regimented

14/ Digest of Laws Affecting Organized Camping. National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, Washington, D. C.

15/ Creative Camping. Joshua Lieberman. Association Press, 347 Madison Avenue, New York City.

camp schedules were eliminated. In organizing camps for children it is of course necessary to keep in mind the fact that a child needs adult guidance and regulation to protect his own health. But these regulations may usually be confined to proper provisions for rest, regular meals, cleanliness, sanitation, positive safety instruction and protection from undue exposure to the elements. A camp situation can provide excellent opportunity for expansion of interests, social adjustment and individual growth, if adult dictatorship and artificial organization of camp activities and camp life can be avoided.

The same principles of freedom and creative guidance of course apply to an even greater degree to camps for adults. With the development of State Parks and of Recreation Demonstration Projects by the National Park Service near populous urban centers, there is greater opportunity for provision of camping experiences at low cost to adults of low-income urban groups. The organization and management of such camps is taken care of by the sponsoring group. This sponsoring agency hires the camp director and the WPA Recreation Program services a camp of this sort by advising and consulting with the sponsoring agency in the initial stages of organization, and by providing

Recreation leadership to serve under the supervision of the camp director when such leadership is requested. 16/17/

In each type of nature program, on a hike, at a day camp or at an established camp the sound program is that designed for maximum individual development and with a minimum of forced, artificial or regimented activity.

16/ Nature in Recreation. New York City Works Projects Administration 70 Columbus Avenue, New York City.

17/ State Parks Recreation. Illinois Works Projects Administration, 6th Floor, Merchandise Mart Building, Chicago, Illinois.

249