

## SUMMER CAMPING

A radio talk given by Ralph D. Roehm, Boys' Secretary, Dayton YMCA and Director of Camp Kern over station W S M K - May 28, 1933

When your friend says, "Come on, Bill, let's go camping", it may be necessary first to find out what he means, for camping means different things to different people. It may mean a fishing trip to a northern Michigan shack or it may mean a motor trip, stopping to camp along the way. It may mean a cottage on a restful lake or stream, or it may mean "dude ranching" out west with some riding, or attempted riding, of a horse. All of these forms of camping have value and make their appeal to many people each year.

However, "going camping", means something else to a growing number of parents and boys and girls - it means the organized summer camp. Camping has spread so rapidly across the country that today there are more than five thousand organized summer camps for boys and girls in the United States and Canada. These camps enroll approximately one hundred million boys and girls each summer, and in normal times parents spend approximately one hundred million dollars a year in fees for their children attending camp.

Camping is being recognized more each year as an agency for informal education. Not for education of the classroom type, as camps are not equipped for much work in this field, but for a broad education for leisure. With the promise of increased leisure time for everyone in the future, informal education in the crafts and in games that can be played practically throughout life, takes on a new significance. This the camp is equipped to do. Ex-President Charles M. Eliot of Harvard once made this statement - "The organized summer camp is the most important step in education that America has given the world". If this is true, the summer camp has a large responsibility to fill,

Camping can do many things for a boy. I am reminded of Ned who came to camp with the physical handicap of flat feet, and the mental handicap of believing he could not do the things other boys did. Because of his foot condition he had never played baseball and a sense of inferiority had developed that was hard to overcome. First, it was necessary to help Ned build up confidence in himself, then to instruct him in the rules of baseball. Next he had to be shown how to hold and how to swing his bat. Campers and counselors were asked to help by encouraging him when he tried to play. They soon caught the spirit of the thing and cheered Ned on. Days passed without any noticeable improvement. Finally the great day came when Ned actually hit the ball and ran to first base. Later when he came to tell me of his accomplishment, his eyes shone with a sense of real achievement. He had made a definite step toward self-confidence.

You may ask what brings boys and girls back to camp year after year. What do parents expect from camping, and what are camp directors and their staffs trying to accomplish?

First in the desires of campers is the wholesome combination of fellowship, freedom and fun. In a boys' camp, there are the enduring friendships of boy with boy, and boy with counselor. These are indelibly fixed by constant, close-in contact in the everyday experiences of living. Hills, woods, and river afford refreshment for body and mind from the distractions and restraints of modern city life. Fun comes in the doing of things boys like to do: - blazing trails and making campfires; learning the lore of nature and of the forest; enjoying sports and recreation on land and water; acquiring skill in various forms of handicraft - all under supervision of leaders worthy of their affectionate loyalty.

The basic concern of parents in relation to camp naturally is for the health and safety of their boys. They want to be sure that every precaution is taken to safeguard campers both in and out of the water. They want to know that the food is well-prepared and cooked with good variety and sufficient quantity for boys living in the open. They want to be sure the diet includes enough green vegetables and butter, milk, and eggs. They are interested when they learn that the drinking water and milk are tested periodically by the Board of Health. They are glad to know that first aid remedies are kept on hand and that a physician is available should an emergency occur.

Parents are equally concerned about waterfront safety. They are happy to know that camp regulations set definite times for swimming and boating; that there are sufficient life-guards patrolling the swimming area, that the "Buddy" system is used during swimming when the command "Find your buddy" given by the swimming director means a quick check-up of those in the water. The sanitary conditions in the camp are also carefully scrutinized by interested fathers and mothers.

Parents have other interests also in camp. They expect the camp to develop or maintain habits of good etiquette, tidiness, and politeness in their boys. They want to get better obedience and discipline, but they cross their fingers as they wish. They look for a measure of physical development and improvement of health and a certain proficiency in the various camp skills.

To be quite frank, a good many parents want to be free from parental responsibility for a period during the summer, and consequently turn to the camp to take care of their boys. This vacation of the boy from his parents usually has a happy ending for both parents and boy. It constitutes a definite step in the emotional weaning of a boy from his parents which must eventually take place. It puts the boy more "on his own", helps to smooth out minor points of friction and brings parents and boys back together at the close of camp, appreciating each other more. Most parents hope their boys will learn how to get along better with other boys, and make other gains in character development.

This last objective - character development - is after all the phase of camping in which camp directors are most interested. They are interested certainly in the desires of their campers and of parents and attempt to meet these requirements. But increasingly they are looking at all the things that make up camp life in terms of what effect they are actually having on the lives of the boys in the camp. They look at swimming and nature study and all the other camp activities as means toward an end-that end being constructive changes in habits and attitudes that will bring socially desirable behavior changes and growth in character.

While a particular camp may offer the opportunities for meeting the desires of campers and parents, there is no guarantee that it will do so. The vital factor always is the camp leadership. Various camps reflect their varied leadership, differing as they do in program and emphasis. A discriminating choice will enable parents to secure the kind of program they desire and so be sure that the summer weeks will be weeks of growth, safety and unforgettable happiness for their boys.

Most camp booklets are worthy of study as revealing the ideals of the director. It is also good to talk with a parent who has sent his boy to a particular camp. If possible, meet the director and some of the counselors, for leadership is the most essential factor in camp.

An interesting study of the leadership at Camp Ahmek made by Hedley S. Dimock, professor in George Williams College, Chicago, has proven conclusively that Grade "A" counselors, those who rated highest on the camp staff, contributed most to their boys and that the boys in turn made the largest gains in character change. In the same study it was shown that Grade "D" counselors not only did not make a contribution to their boys but a small loss in character change of the boys was noted.

There are many kinds of camps operated by organizations, schools and individuals. Among the organizational camps there are those under the direction of the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Boy Scouts of America, and the Girl Scouts. Private camps are usually directed by educators from our best schools and colleges and by independent educators like Doctor Frank D. Slutz of Dayton.

Here in Dayton, for instance, the Y M C A has operated Camp Kern since 1910. It is located along the Little Miami River, near Fort Ancient, the pre-historic home of the mound builders. Sixty-five acres of woods, hills, and rock bordering the west bank of the river comprise the camp site. Living quarters are in cabins accommodating ten boys and a counselor. The large Council House includes a dining room, kitchen, and craftshop. There is a pier, a diving float, and row boats for watersports. The athletic field furnishes equipment for baseball, soccer, tennis, volleyball, archery, and track and field events.

The counselors who supervise the camp activities are college-trained men of proven ability and character. The objectives as determined by the staff at Camp Kern are these:

We seek to develop in boys:

- First. A knowledge and appreciation of the beauties of nature in her various forms.
  - Second. The ability to discover and improve their skills in handicraft, games, swimming, life-saving, first aid, music, and dramatics.
  - Third. Resourcefulness, a greater tolerance and concern for others and an increased individual responsibility.
  - Fourth. The establishment of regular health habits.
  - Fifth. A greater understanding and appreciation of fellow campers and of boys from this and foreign countries.
  - Sixth. An attitude of complete cooperation in the work and play of the camp life and a loyalty to its purposes.
- And finally, A growing awareness of the presence of God as a vital force in life.

This summer our boys face a long vacation - four months of leisure time. Camping offers an interesting constructive program for at least a part of this period. Many homes are now making vacation plans which include two weeks or longer in camp for their boys. Everyone who knows camping knows it is a great experience for any boy.