

Imaginative Use of the Camp Site

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Perhaps the greatest appeal of summer camps is the promise they hold of enabling campers to escape the artificialities and exacting demands of life in our modern towns and cities and to get back to nature in a setting as primitive as possible. Paradoxically, as the popularity of a camp increases, there are more modern living quarters, more comforts, conveniences and luxuries. With more and better buildings there must, of course, be more and better landscaping until any resemblance to a natural setting is purely accidental. Fortunate are those camps which are located within, or adjacent to, areas of unspoiled wilderness and doubly fortunate are those which have been carefully planned from the beginning, so that all buildings are so-called improvements blend harmoniously with the natural setting with as little destruction of natural beauty as possible.

Regardless of the history of the camp site, there will remain countless possibilities for crating within the campers a consciousness of the Creator through observation of the things which He has created. The Old Testament abounds in references to natural phenomena. So does the New Testament. These references may be used as a basis for a spiritually stimulating nature study program for the campers. The Genesis account of creation, with the references to it by other Biblical writers, is more than a mechanical enumeration of the things which God did. Its message is one of great spiritual depth which can not be explored in an article such as this, but attention can be called to some of its message. Every living organism, from the smallest to the greatest, is of God's creation and each occupies its own particular niche and performs its own function in the community or organisms. If youngsters can be made to grasp the idea that each of God's creatures is tangible testimony of His power and living demonstration of His truth in continuing operation, it is inconceivable that they could or would engage in wanton destruction. A primary rule should be, observe and enjoy but do not molest or destroy. Collection and preservation of specimens for a permanent reference collection is to be encouraged but with certain restrictions. Collect specimens only from situations where they are abundant and then only in the amount which is needed and which can and will be properly cared for. Each camp site has its own potential and each nature-study director will have his own ideas concerning the best use of that potential. Campers are individuals whose personalities largely determine their response to any given project or activity. Because of the number of variables which must be considered, no standardized program can be expected to succeed in all situations.

Two factors should be carefully examined and thoroughly studied before specific projects are outlined. These are: the over-all objective, or objectives, of the nature program, and the possible utilization of the camp site in the realization of the objectives. Each of these factors bears strongly upon the other. The objective of the nature program should not be teaching of facts. The schools can do that. The objective should be, as previously indicated, orientation of the campers with the hope of bringing them into a consciousness of the Creator through observation of things of His creation. What more effective way could be found to improve upon young minds that God is one (Mark 12:24); that God is not the author of confusion, but of harmony (I Cor. 14:33), than through an understanding of His handiwork? The possibilities are endless. Some suggestions are given below.

If the habitats to which the campers have access are varied, hikes to each type of habitat may be arranged. With some guidance by the adult leader, the dominant plants in any situation can be determined by the campers. The relationships of other plants to the dominant ones can then be deduced and as a natural corollary, the presence of insects and other animals which make use of the plants for food or shelter becomes clear. The question of predation is almost sure to be brought up. This furnishes a good opportunity to lead the campers into a realization of the inevitable catastrophe which follows over-population of any organism in nature. An understanding of the basic principles governing such a community of organisms is an understanding of one of the facets of the nature of God.

Perhaps few passages in the Bible are better known or better loved than the Nineteenth Psalm, and the heavens by day or by night declare the glory of God more eloquently than any written or spoken word.

Everywhere one turns there is silent testimony to the unity of truth. Young minds should be encouraged to believe in a God as great as the God to whom all nature bears testimony.