

The Role of Camping and Our American Heritage

By

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OUT of all the riches that constitute our American heritage, deep understanding and appreciation of our land is one of the most valuable, though at present one of the most retarded. Our youth do not spend enough time on it to gain this understanding. To return to them the opportunity to secure this precious part of their birthright is the greatest contribution which camping can make to America and its future.

Awareness of our total American heritage comes most at times when it is being threatened. That is the case now. Every individual should re-examine his design for living made possible by the people who founded this nation, and take stock of himself to see how he measures up.

As our Constitution and Bill of Rights are passed on to those who follow they only give assurance that each individual has a *right* to have these freedoms and liberties to the extent he can assume the responsibilities they entail. It is not implied that each individual *has* them without effort on his part. Each person has the definite obligation to *acquire* these benefits for himself. It is something that happens inside of oneself. It is a feeling and a conviction that comes as a result of study and work. It requires much worthy practice in a wide range of experience. We learn that which we practice, therefore we need much practice in the use of our freedoms and liberties in order fully to acquire them.

It is not the intention of this article to review the many rights and freedoms we have. The particular question is to determine how the camping movement relates itself to our American heritage and how it can implement its program by a fuller understanding of and appreciation for the land itself.

CAMPING IS BORN IN AMERICA

In our quest for a better camp program to capture the full meaning of this *land heritage*, we can learn much from the peoples before us who have lived on this land.

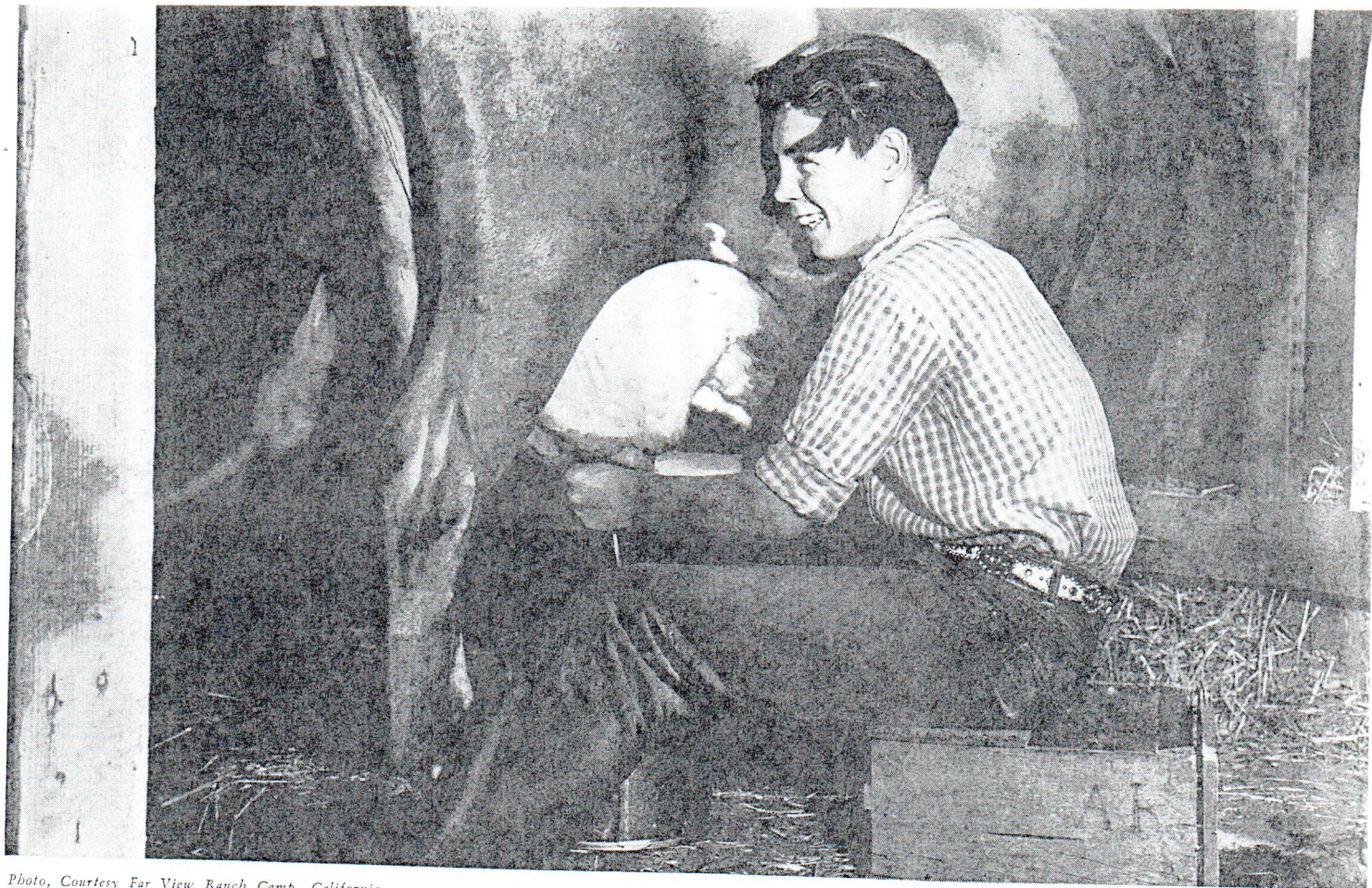
The first campers in this country were the Indians. They were wholly dependent upon nature for their food and shelter. They knew the plants and roots

and knew their many uses. They built houses and shelters best adapted to the surrounding country, to material at hand, and to the climate. They were agriculturalists—developed drought corn, practiced soil fertilization, made irrigation ditches and have made many other valuable contributions of benefit to us. From the standpoint of appreciation of his surroundings, care of self, resourcefulness, utilization of natural resources and the practice of simplicity of living, the Indian was a good camper.

The period of the early explorers, traders, prospectors and trappers marked a second chapter in camping. These rugged individuals had to know the way of the woods in order to make their expeditions successful. With the help of friendly Indians it was possible for them to accomplish their goals. The stories of these hardy and daring people add a significant part to the larger concept of adventurous camping.

With the landing of the Pilgrims began a period of settlement in this land. It was their determination to throw off shackles, secure freedom, and create a new way of community life. Their course was not charted other than by a determination *to create*. They were actually camping. It is significant that these Pilgrims should have recorded, at a meeting on board their flimsy vessel, ". . . and so it was decided on the morrow that a small party should go ashore and select a camp site," and further, ". . . a camp site was selected on high ground and there it was further decided by consent of most common voices that each man should build his own home."

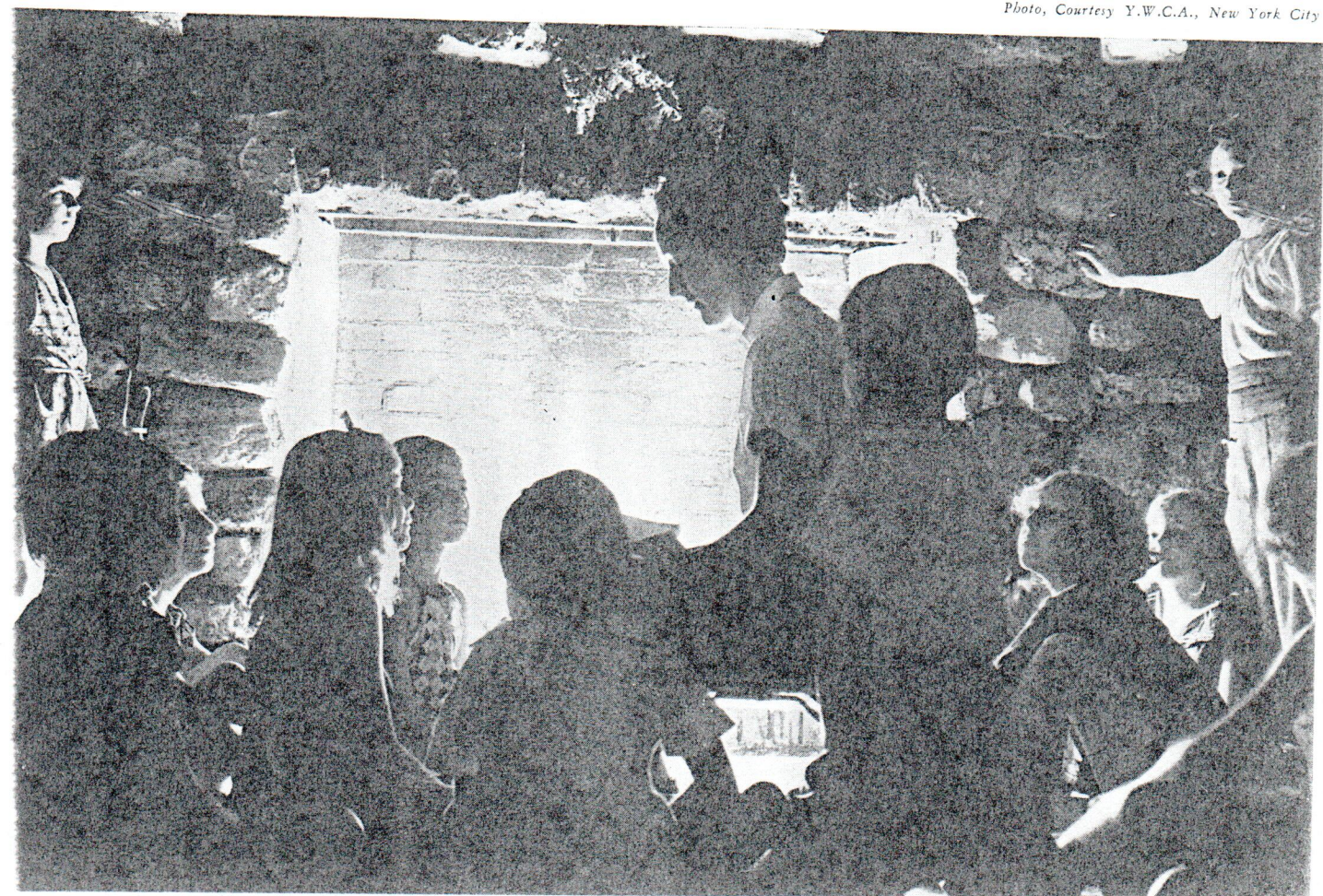
The birth of our nation from this point and its growth up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the adoption of our Bill of Rights, is a thrilling story of adventure, resourcefulness, determination, hard work and cooperative living. The life these early settlers lived was realistic and purposeful, made up chiefly of providing their own shelter, securing food, following their religious convictions, grouping themselves in small, cooperative communities, furnishing their own amusements and occupying their time with productive work. The part that land—the mountains, streams, woods and all of



Photo, Courtesy Far View Ranch Camp, California

THE HERITAGE OF THE FARM (above)—OF THE BIG AMERICAN FAMILY (below)

Photo, Courtesy Y.W.C.A., New York City





Photo, *Life Camps*

Cleanliness Is the Rule in This Lad's Camp

nature—played in this progress was most real. It was their chief source of support, and they understood well its many gifts. They did not seek material possessions except as a means of extending their way of life.

This dependency upon the land, respect for it, love of it, constitutes an important part of our heritage which we have lost in part, and which we need to regain. Our concept of democracy arose out of this realistic way of living in the earlier days of our country. It was not an academic process. The words written into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights merely expressed the ideals and accomplishments they had already made real to themselves. They were not documents of intangible ideas, but results of hard work put into words expressing our concept of democratic living.

The pioneers in their sturdy homes on wheels camped their way across the country in quest of prosperity and security. All through the '40's, '50's, '60's, and '70's of the last century could be heard the call, "Catch Up, Catch Up." It came from the leaders of the covered-wagon caravans and immigrant trails headed for the far west to the land of hope.

The stories of the Santa Fe and Oregon trails and many others furnish stirring episodes for a spirit and pattern needed in camping today. These pioneers lived a life of daring and adventure. They were on their own as individuals and families, camping in the

fullest degree. Routine life proceeded without undue complaint or protest; families remained together; groups remained intact. There was determination, resourcefulness and independence of a high order. They lived together in joy and sorrow, in adventure and thrills. Their life and success depended upon their skills and craftsmanship—their strength and courage. On they plodded, regardless of heat, cold, rain, thunder and lightning, sand and wind storms and floods.

The problem of feeding was difficult. Food had to be carefully selected, prepared, preserved and guarded. There were ways of pressing vegetables and drying the pulp so that they would keep in all kinds of weather.

Cooking on the trail was difficult and required skill and patience as it does on the camp trail of today.



Photo, *Life Camps*

Safe Drinking Water on the Covered-Wagon Trail

A pioneer woman in Ford's Party of 1844 kneaded her dough, built and kept a fire, and cooked a meal while holding an umbrella to keep out of the rain.

There was self-government, the rule of the group, and a recognition of the "unwritten law," which was a tacit agreement that all questions should be settled in council.

The pioneer was an expert craftsman. His work was in the main crude but effective and durable. It met the needs of the time. In a hurry a steer had to be sacrificed. His hide had to be made into rope in

quick time and the rope used to lower supplies and equipment over steep cliffs. Making harness, repairing wagons, braiding, carving, shooting accurately, all were necessary skills that every competent trailman needed to know.

The life of the pioneers was not tragic, at least they did not think so. It was a way of living to them and for the most part they were happy. There were deaths, births, marriages, religious meetings and social parties, celebrations at reaching certain points, gaiety, dancing, music, campfire entertainment, songs, jokes and stunts. The children had their usual fun and presented the usual problems to their parents. H. S. Lyman, a pioneer himself, says that, "the journey was one of the pleasantest incidents of my life. It was a long picnic, changing scenes of the journey, animals of the prairie, the Indians, the traders and trappers of the mountain country, progress of the seasons, all formed a sort of mental culture that the world has rarely offered."

Following in the history of our country came the lumberjacks. The life of these men with the axe, canthook, peavey, wedge and saw; the ranches with horses, squeaking leather, ropes, bacon and song; the seafarers with paddle, sail and helm; the farm with seed, crops and animals—all furnish rich opportunities for adventurous and productive camping.

LIFE CAMPS PLAN

In moderation and without the dangers and hazards, some of this pioneer life is open to our campers through camping in covered wagons and many other

Muffins In a Wash-boiler Oven

Photo, Life Camps



Photo, Life Camps

Each Camper Is His Own Cobbler

Dipping Candles As Grandmother Did

Photo, Life Camps



types of temporary shelters. In an effort to take full advantage of the open spaces for adventurous living, in the Life Camps each camp is decentralized into small, independent groups. In each small camp there are six, seven or eight campers and two counselors. Each family group adopts a type of camping of its own where the campers have an opportunity to design and build their own shelter, under guidance provide their own menus, cook and prepare meals, develop their own program and solve their problems of group living and work.

Some of the shelters used by these groups are tepees, longhouses, round-tos, tree houses, covered sleds, individual longhouses, hogans, lean-tos and covered wagons.

In the covered wagon groups it is most interesting to find that the life of the campers to a certain extent is like that of the pioneers. This small camp group living, playing, working, cooking and eating together brings forth cooperation and interdependence to a greater degree than in a centralized program.

Group difficulties and problems are settled by group discussion. Their activities for the day are planned together. They share fun, success, difficulties and problems. The small group campfire is the place for their singing, playing of instruments—a harmonica, a banjo, and the strains of "Oh Suzannah" and many other Western tunes can be heard.

There is no need for regimentation, regularity, and a conformity to the general camp program. There are no departments or activities. There is a life unto themselves, bringing successes, pleasures and adventures—*camping*.

A group of campers living in this manner must know how to cook, build and keep a fire in the rain. They must be skilled in the various arts and crafts and in the use of tools. They learn to be resourceful as activity is purposeful. In their work and play they seldom know where one ends and the other begins. At the end of the day all are settled for a restful night. It is not long until day breaks, and minus the proverbial bugle, another day of pleasure and adventure starts in a quiet way.

Little did the early pioneers realize that their crude but sturdy moving homes on wheels would eventually become a model for apart of a great educational program of the present day, and that their way of living, with certain modifications, would become a method of camping. The covered wagon is again on the trail.

CHARTING OUR COURSE

It is not possible in our present-day education of youth to give them sufficient experience in the resourceful living preponderant in the early days of our country. It is not intended here to imply that we should abandon our social and economic progress and go back to the days of the Pilgrims and early

settlers. Not at all. It is intended, however, to stress the fact that the values gained from this pioneer type of experience are fundamental and necessary in our present-day life if we are to gain full appreciation of that essential part of our heritage. Here is where camping can and should make its greatest contribution.

Most of our youth today have very little opportunity to grow up on the earth. Too much of their lives is confined to stone, wood and concrete, and we are now being called to return to the earth as a better way of life for at least enough of the time that we may not lose contact with it, understanding of it and appreciation for it. How can we *know* what "thy rocks and rills," "woods and templed hills," *really mean* unless we live with them, know their beauty, their power and worth.

One has to spend a lot of time in the out-of-doors to grasp the significance of the treasures that the earth holds for us. After a period of musing on a particularly beautiful spot, the writer gave expression to his feelings in these words:

peace—quiet—grandeur,
majesty—beauty—rhythm,
any part of it, all of it,
anytime, all the time, night and day,
Yuletide, springtime, summer, autumn—

everchanging, growing, creating,
never still—silent and smooth,
though forceful—

softens, inspires one's soul
giving new visions, new hopes—
raises one's spiritual self.

Strength.

so full of reverence and companionship,
we need what she holds.

blanketed in snow, drenched in rain—
crowned with green, tinted with gold—
her hidden mysteries beckon—

Come! and linger.

In the case of a camper who had many experiences of living deep in the woods, he answered his question, "What is the Night?" in his own words:

What is the night?

A dark and fearsome thing

That causes us to tremble

To bend our knees and pray for light?

Ah no! 'Tis beauty,

'Tis beauty born of peace

And rest from earthly strife

A part of eternity is the beauty of the night.

Through an exploratory program of resourceful living, being on one's own, it was possible for a camper to write—

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