

Summary by Mr. L. B. Sharp, Executive Director, Life Camps and National Camp, New York, New York, of the discussion group on "Current Camping Problems" given at the Friday morning session, October 3, 1941, of the 26th National Recreation Congress, held at the Lord Baltimore Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland:

MR. L. B. SHARP: I, too, will make a dive for that free Coca-Cola. They are free, however, and you can all have as many as you want. But, the thrill is in the chase, and I am told that there is also a thrill in a chaser. We will also have to be chasing trains at the same time.

Camping is too broad a subject to present in a few moments. However, the general conception of camping fundamentally is too limited. You often see the word listed along with quoits, tennis and golf. What we need to do is to lift our eyes and our vision to a broader concept of life out of doors, to a pattern of life, a way of living, something larger in a newer education to come. The discussion approached that, got very close to it, but did not quite get into it. The meeting on the whole was like a gorgeous banquet spread, august participants, a chief carver and an audience, with everybody ready to taste and devour the delectables, and then things happened. Why, there were so many problems raised and suggested for the menu at this camping banquet that there wasn't room for them in the room, although all the windows were raised. Discussion of suggestions for the menu made it impossible to taste some of the items. There was not time enough for all. The Waldorf salad of winter camping, asparagus tips on toast, values of group living, the dessert of family camping, and the spiritual demi-tasse were left untouched.

As to the participants -- Chairman, Mr. H. D. Edgren - Discussion Leaders, Miss Ruby Jolliffe, Mr. Wes Klusman - and, we were fortunate to have, in the absence of Mr. Julian H. Salomon and Mr. H. B. Masters, our beloved Captain Bill, whom you in recreation circles throughout the country know. He moved very quickly from one chair to another attempting to cover both seats.

Now, there was plenty of light in the room so there was brilliance enough to cover all that we had time to devour.

"What is a camp?" was an interesting question, but that, too, was one of those little hors d'oeuvres of which there was not enough. Its meaning ranged from merely a place in the country where you can go to scratch poison ivy to the ideal way of life or loving to live in the out of doors.

The chief problem, it seemed, was the camp director himself. The reason for him being the chief problem was that he is afraid to go camping. That analysis might aptly apply in other fields of endeavor, recreation and education.

The counselors seemed to be another important problem, that of how and where to get qualified leaders. It was regretted that some of them are going into the service of Uncle Sam because that upsets the camp program. But some of them can learn a lot camping for Uncle Sam.

The training of leadership was important. This topic was inadequately treated due to lack of time and ^{not to a shortage} of talent or ideas. Adequately trained leaders is one of the greatest needs in the camping movement.

The age limit was discussed. That seemed to be a very minor subject but it was rather interesting that a child was defined in terms of

camping as a person up to twenty. That left most of us out.

Homesickness was an interesting but a minor problem, and a novel method of handling it was to make the homesick child an aide in the clinic. The problem back of that, of course, is far more fundamental. It is regretted that there was not a chance to go into the question enough to say that a personalized approach and a challenging program is a better way to solve the problem.

Raising of standards was suggested as a way of improving the whole practice of camping in the United States. This would undoubtedly be so to the extent there could be agreement as to what constitutes standards. Conferences are being held, however, and researches are being made to point out ways of raising the standards in camp. There is the danger, however, in freezing practice rather than freeing and improving it.

Another very interesting topic was co-education. You can always get an interesting, really juicy, luscious discussion on co-education in camping. So, true to form, it was on the menu and sampled. But you can well put this point in your notes that the most important provision necessary to make a success in co-education camping is to have a staff of high quality. Then it was also suggested to have women counselors for boys and men counselors for girls. Wow! And a feminine voice expressed the sentiment of the group, perhaps: "Not a bad i-d-e-a".

Day camps were suggested as an important step in things to come in spreading the camping movement, and they have already made a splendid contribution.

Many meetings have reported that the school janitor is a decided

problem and a deterrent to recreation progress, but I want to assure you that there was no school janitor problem discussed. Camping is too far out in the woods for him.

Democracy in camps was suggested and discussed at some length. It is hoped we will do more real camping in smaller groups as a practical way of reaching that worthy ideal.

Some consideration was given to the type of organization set-up in a camp and the relationship to results in personality growth. There is a relationship. The question of decentralization naturally followed. There is a definite trend toward decentralization -- to divide campers up into smaller cohesive groups putting them on their own. It was refreshing to see this point stressed in such an important way. It is a delectable dish which has been served in spoonfuls at times, and now I hope this association will bring on the whole bowlful.

Defense naturally took a prominent place. Camping at its best is probably one of the best preparations and one of the best defense programs, so be it, and that is true for now and for the future. There were some suggestions in the name of defense -- "Did without dessert", "gathered huckleberries and sold them", and "put on benefit shows". That is all good; it shows a heart. But it should be added that it will take a lot of berry-picking to influence defense needs and camping for America in a very vital way. Mr. Klusman, from the Boy Scouts, indicated that "we need practice in organizing people in living out of doors to meet practical situations".

War is awful, but if it takes bombs to drive people into the woods, and if we have to have bombs eventually, some good might come from it. That is one way of getting people into the woods. I would hate to see

this method used to promote camping.

Transportation was discussed fervently, and the kernel out of that question is to say that while school buses are being used a lot for transporting children to camp, put it down in your notebooks to work out a plan to change the direction of most of the school buses in America. At least a large part of them and for a part of the school time are going in the wrong direction, ^{with children.} Fill the buses as usual and head for the open spaces as part of the school program.

At this lovely banquet, just as we were ready to eat some ^{chicken} of this new camping education, which the waiters had brought right up in front of us, we sniffed it, and then they took it away, and we had weiners. Now, of course, there are many interesting ways to cook weiners, and sometimes you think you are eating chicken, but you really are not. I urge this association to partake lavishly of the camping education chicken -- American youth like it. Camping should become an integral part of the educational system of America. It is the next and best step in education, and it is time to take it. (Applause)
