

Guest Editor Clare Conley Says . . .

Camping is Now Basically An All-Family Activity

By CLARE CONLEY
Editor, Field & Stream

A decade ago when I flew in to New York City from the West to interview for a job on the Field & Stream editorial staff, one of the questions that the publisher of the magazine asked me was, "What do you think will be the next area of interest in the outdoors shown by the American public?"

Naturally, I replied that I thought it would be camping, and this must have been what the publisher thought, because I got the job and have stayed on to become editor of the magazine, and camping went on to become one of the biggest activities participated in by Americans in the outdoors rivalled only by fishing.

Adding a Few Thoughts

During that decade I have seen hundreds of articles devoted to various aspects of camping and many in one way or another get around to explaining as best they can why camping suddenly became so popular, but I'd like to add a few thoughts on that subject in the light of today's living, because, after all, camping not only became popular, but stayed that way.

Although it may have seemed in many parts of the United States that camping suddenly became popular, actually it had been in use in many areas all along. However, with the beginning of the 1960's camping moved from an activity that was an adjunct to other things, such as hunting and fishing, to become a family activity of its own.

The reason for this was that Americans had become more mobile, wealthier and had more free time, but there was one other element that is often ignored.

North Americans are closeted to the outdoors and feel a strong need to get away from a city atmosphere as often and as long as possible to regenerate themselves. This manifests itself in the desire to travel and see the United States, plus touring Canada and Mexico too.

Basic to Character

Although it's an overused phrase, camping brought an improved standard of living. Camping represented a basic element in the character of Americans to return to rustic living. It provided a means of changing the everyday settings of their lives and seeing a broader part of the world around them.

The constant improvement in camping equipment has been a second reason that camping has stayed popular. Today campers can have just about any degree of comfort and luxury that they choose.

For those who still want to communicate with nature on the rustic level, there is tenting, but even in this improvements have come to provide materials that are lighter and more water resistant; tents that practically erect themselves, eliminating tent stakes and ropes, and tents that have floors and zipper flaps. Sleeping bags and camp cooking equipment also have been equally improved.

Closer to Elements

But all this has been done without removing that factor of camping, which many people desire — that of being close to the elements.

By contrast, one of the biggest growth areas in camping has been in pickup campers and coaches, camping trailers, and small trailer houses. These, of course, offer comforts and conveniences almost equal to that of any home.

What this all amounts to is that the continual improvement, both in design and materials of equipment for camping, has been a factor in making the activity widely popular, because it satisfies the desires of all kinds of people.

Finally, I believe the fact that camping is basically a family activity has been a strong reason for its lasting popularity. In today's modern scene, particularly around cities, the pressures of modern living tend to pull families apart, giving the mem-

bers little time to be together.

Camping has just the opposite effect. It tends to bring the family together because it takes them away from their everyday lives and moves them to a new setting as a family unit, and because it takes them away from the pressures that pull them apart at home.

Spanning the Gap

I'm not going to say that camping can span the generation gap. That has been caused by a lack of understanding between adults and young adults, but closer communications within a family, such as must take place when camping, can help provide that understanding. This is a proven psychological fact.

And now in looking over what I have had to say about camping and its reasons for being so popular, I'm not so sure I have hit exactly on the answer either.

I can remember camping as a child on fishing trips with the family; I can remember camping through western Canada with two college friends in an old wreck car, and again camping with my wife in Canada on our honeymoon.

Later I camped in the Arctic in both hemispheres, at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, near a lake 10,000 feet high, under the wing of my plane, and where the only way to reach camp was by boat.

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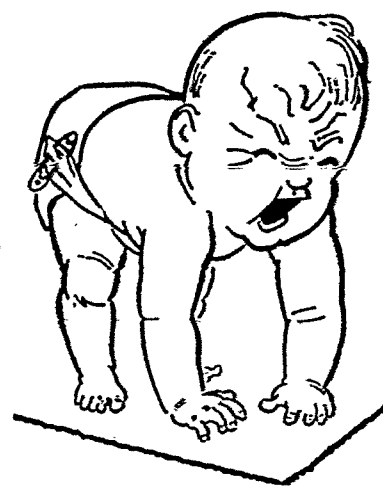
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