

Camping and Excursions

4

STRUCTURE

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives
- 4.3 Why Camps?
- 4.4 Camping, Excursions and Transacting
Textbook Lessons
- 4.5 What Goes Into Organizing Camps
- 4.6 Some Tips for Organizing a Camp
- 4.7 Camping in Coastal Areas-An Example
- 4.8 Conclusion



4.1

Nature Camps and nature education have long been a part of educator's lexicon; the imaginative teaching and learning experiences that can be conceptualized through these are of immense value both in terms of general awareness as well as a locale-specific experience. Even then, schools hesitate to see the opportunity presented by nature camps for enhancing teaching capacities of its teachers as well as learning potential for its students. There are several reasons for this, often school management finds it difficult to take on this 'additional task' or organize such camping and excursion programmes during holidays. The latter reduces the possibility of such trips being linked to syllabus which can be very effectively taught during excursions and short outings. If a teacher, who accompanies students to these camps, can successfully establish the linkages between the learning on such trips and textbook lessons, much of the reluctance of school management to permit classes to go out during school term would be removed.

It is true that parents are also reluctant to let their children join school trips. They are most concerned about possible diversions of their children's time and energies already heavily burdened by demanding academic schedule. If, however, the school authorities overcome their resistance in permitting camping and outing programmes as part of the teaching process, parental objections would become minimal.

Also, the conducting of specific teaching activities in outdoors depends on the teacher and his/her own enthusiasm. Developing a teaching programme outside the classroom has many problems which teachers must prepared for beforehand.

In this Unit, we will discuss how Camping and Excursions can be excellent opportunities for transacting EE linked to the curriculum.

4.2

On completion of this unit, you should be able to

- Organize two-to-three days camping trip for your class
- Carry out a variety of EE activities on the campsite and link it to curriculum

4.3 WHY CAMPS?

Camps provide an effective teaching-learning approach for not only raising awareness in the children about natural processes, but also to bring them closer to nature by enhancing their feelings and appreciation for nature.

In terms of skill building among students, camps are an excellent way of building skills of higher order—observation, analysis, and synthesis; as well



as lower order ones such as organizing, planning, etc. Camps are also opportunities for social cohesion, team work, interpersonal skills, etc. Camps, through groups, initiate the process of discovering the wonders of nature and feeling one with its complexities and taking action towards improving ones own lifestyle, making it less taxing for the planet.

Above all, camps, like any other outdoor education effort, sharpen the various senses in children and train them to use them with equal effectiveness. Unlike the present day living style and classroom teaching, where the sense of sight/vision is overused, and senses such as sense of touch are minimally used, camps help children to use the various senses appropriately. Activities encouraging the use of various senses should be carried out early in the programme to help campers enjoy the nature during the camp by using all their senses effectively. Activities such as mapping the sound; spreading the shades of a single colour seen, describing the smell of certain leaves and explaining the texture of leaves, the bark of trees, etc. conducted during a nature trail can be helpful.

4.4 CAMPING, EXCURSIONS AND TRANSACTING TEXTBOOK LESSONS

Almost every subject can utilize an outdoor situation for learning. For example, Geography can be advantageously taught outside the classroom. A marine camp is best to make students understand the phases of the moon and how they affect tides. Mountain region is best for observing soil erosion, weathering of rocks, movement of winds as well as the influence of the topography on the weather and climate of the area.

In this process, broad concepts of the environment can also be put across to students. For example the importance of vegetation in holding soil, the formation of clouds over wooded hill slopes provide live evidence of the role of forests in increasing precipitation in an area. Students will find observing formation of clouds from the mountain top very exciting. During the observations, you can initiate a variety of discussion to link the experience to textbook lessons.

Learning about plant communities cannot be very efficiently done unless children actually see these for themselves from some vantage point. Such observations can lead to discussions about why certain types of vegetation grow in one part of the country and a different type in another. Types of rock formations are best shown while in the field; students can easily understand the process of fossil formation when they see sedimentation taking place. There are many locations where it is possible to see fossil-bearing rocks.

Students can also get excited by watching marine life on a coral reef or observing the biodiversity in a fresh water pond. Even the most casual observation can bring about quality learning which may never take place inside a classroom. However, learnings from such experiences need to be reinforced and followed-up through a more structured process such as a classroom session or an assignment, discussion, etc.



4.5 WHAT GOES INTO ORGANIZING A CAMP

Organizing a camping trip calls for a great deal of pre-planning which many teachers may find an additional burden in their already packed schedules. Fortunately, today, there are many agencies who organize nature camps for school groups through which schools can send groups to such camps. As a teacher, you may want to make optimum use of these camping experiences as opportunities for transacting textbook concepts. A teacher who has planned well before going out, can make an excursion, or a few days in a camp, far more educative than is possible in the traditional setting of a school.

It is advisable to organize camping trips on a class basis and not for a heterogeneous group of students. The general tendency in schools is that one or two teachers accompany a group of students during camping trips without any specific objective relating to transacting the syllabus. In order to render the camping effort effective, students of a class should attend at least one camp every year and be given the chance to participate in a wide variety of programmes.

Also, students tend to become very boisterous when outside the confines of the classroom; managing them may become a task in itself. With so many things around them, there is a real difficulty in making them concentrate on very specific issues. How you handle such situations becomes a determining factor for the success of the experience. Some planning, and of course experience, can overcome these challenges. You as a teacher must be comfortable in the outdoor situations before you can become effective.

4.6 SOME TIPS FOR ORGANIZING A CAMP

A little preparation goes a long way towards ensuring a successful camp. It is very important to prepare before the campers arrive. Some of the important planning tips are:

Find a Central Nature Study Area

Select a good site on your camp as a place of key activities—meeting groups, storing supplies, etc. If you are starting a new programme and have the liberty of choosing a location for a nature study area, find an area that has multiple environments nearby. For instance, areas of woods and field provide a diverse setting for nature games.

Gather necessary resources—reference material, equipments, any safety equipments, first aids, etc.

Explore Your Camp Site

Discover what trails are particularly conducive to nature study activities. Remember the location of unique areas, such as streams, scenic sites, and



unusual plants/biodiversity. Similarly also explore the area around the camp. Locate any excellent nature centres nearby, if any, and keep them in mind for special field trips. A few non-camp based sessions could add variety to your curriculum/planned activities and may provide you a chance to explore new places with your students.

Take support/help from local naturalists. If you take time to investigate your neighbourhood, you can often find people who can add a unique expertise to your programme. Whether they specialize in stars or plants, many people are more than happy to help a few times/value the most nominal support, and be ready to share their knowledge and expertise with children at such camps.

Last but not the least, as a camp organizer, you must be all time prepared to handle any emergency situation, be still a small bruise, a big wound or even a snake or a scorpion bite!

4.7 CAMPING IN COASTAL AREAS-AN EXAMPLE

On a camping trip to different types of coastal areas, such as a sandy or a rocky shore, one can find sea-shells, coral remains, sea-weeds and exoskeletons of marine animals like crabs, lobsters, etc. A walk along the beach could lead to interesting questions from students based on their observations. Such discussions could help you conduct integrated lessons, involving biology, geography, chemistry, physics, geology and even arts.

Students can be encouraged to observe the aquatic plants such as hydrilla, vallisneria, bladderworts etc. If necessary one of the plants could be removed for closer observations. However, as far as possible doing any kind of damage to the basic balance of nature should be avoided. Also, students should be asked to avoid disturbing any of the live animals inhabiting the shores.

One of the activities that students can be engaged into is observation and collection of various life-forms found in and around the beach/marine area. For this, students should be asked to look out for movements in the undergrowth, comb leaf-litters, upturn bricks and stones where most of the tiny arthropods, worms, lice, bugs and some kinds of beetles, can be seen. They should be cautioned that these may be hiding places for scorpions too. So this activity should be done with care; a stick should be used to upturn stones or gently comb the leaf-litter.

For insect collection, encourage the collection of the dead ones only for close observation though insects are best observed live in nature. A magnifying glass could be used for closer observation of dead insects.

Making a Collection Net

Choose a length of stick in the shape of “Y”

Tie a handkerchief along its limbs with strings.

The net can be handy for closer observation of fish, molluscs, tadpoles etc.



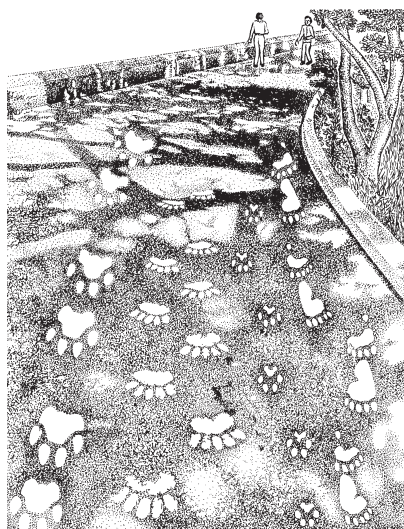
Some do's and don'ts

- Take care not to disturb the habitat
- Replace deadwood, stone, rocks etc. after turning over
- Do not pick too many stones or shells, as they are required by the soil as nutrient for plant growth
- Keep a safe distance from venomous species
- You may collect specimens that propagate abundantly
- The collection of specimens should be from both fauna and flora
- The collection should be for an educational purpose only, and limited
- Specimens which are easy to handle should be collected
- Collection of live specimens should be avoided

Taking Animal Track Prints

During collection trips, you should also keep a close watch on the ground for pug-marks or animal foot-prints. Foot-prints are more distinguishable where the mud is soft, for example, near a water hole. Impressions of such foot-prints could be taken in plaster-of-paris. Plaster casts of shells, tiny burrows etc. can be taken in the following manner:

1. Take plaster-of-paris powder.
2. Add water till it is consistent.
3. Pour the mixture into the cavity of the impression.
4. Wait till the plaster sets. Then gently pry the cast off the ground.
5. Make a mould from the cast by applying oil on the cast impression.
6. Now pour the plaster over it and let it set.
7. Remove the mould by gently tapping the sides.



Collection of Natural Inanimate Objects

Getting to understand inanimate objects like rocks, stones, soil etc. is as essential to learning as understanding life-forms. Though lifeless, these objects have their own beauty. A collection of such things could prove valuable for interpreting the environment and its ceaseless changes. Rocks and soil in one place might be totally different from those in another location; this provides a good variety for collection. With your students, you can do such a collection during biological collection or make a separate trip during the camp. If rocks are small enough, they could be packed in match-boxes. The same can be done with soil samples also. A rocky terrain is the ideal place for rock and crystal collection. River beds are also suitable places for rock collection. Many smoothed pebbles belonging to various places through which the

river flows can be obtained from here. Sometimes it is interesting to collect dead wood or drift wood from slow, shallow streams. Drift wood comes in various sizes and shapes. Some may resemble familiar objects like animal and even human figures. By carefully whittling away portions of the wood the resemblance could be made more striking. You should draw students' attention to the colour, form, hardness, optical properties, texture, where found etc. of the soil/rock, etc. You may even encourage them to take note of these properties. For classifying this collection, books on geology could be referred or additional information can be obtained from Geological Survey of India.

Things to Carry on Field

1. Note pad
2. Sketch pens/pencils/pen etc.
3. An iron rod or a firm stick with one end curved or hooked
4. Glass bottles/jars with perforated cap
5. Polythene bags
6. Forceps (large)
7. Surgical gloves
8. Glass slides
9. String, cloth, cotton, etc.
10. Buckets
11. Magnifying glass

If the coastal site is appropriate, a turtle walk in the night hours can also be organized. Further coastal areas are good locations to conduct sessions on star gazing also. Further there can be discussion sessions on aspects closely linked to natural resources such as the fisheries, its link to the market systems and economy, social aspects such status of men and women in fishing/ coastal communities, their role in the business of fishing; impacts of industrialization on coastal life—wildlife as well as on social set ups, such as trawlers vs small fishing boats, etc.

4.8 CONCLUSION

“We (in India) are in the very initial stage of developing nature camps as effective educative exposures and should not be too concerned about what is missing. There really is never a perfect education module and even if one was developed, in the field of environment other options would offer themselves. So let's get children out of classrooms, learning as our ancestors did, under the wide open skies.”

Lavkumar Khachar, *Experiencing Nature in The Green Teacher-Ideas, Experiences and Learning in educating for the Environment* published by CEE, 1997.

