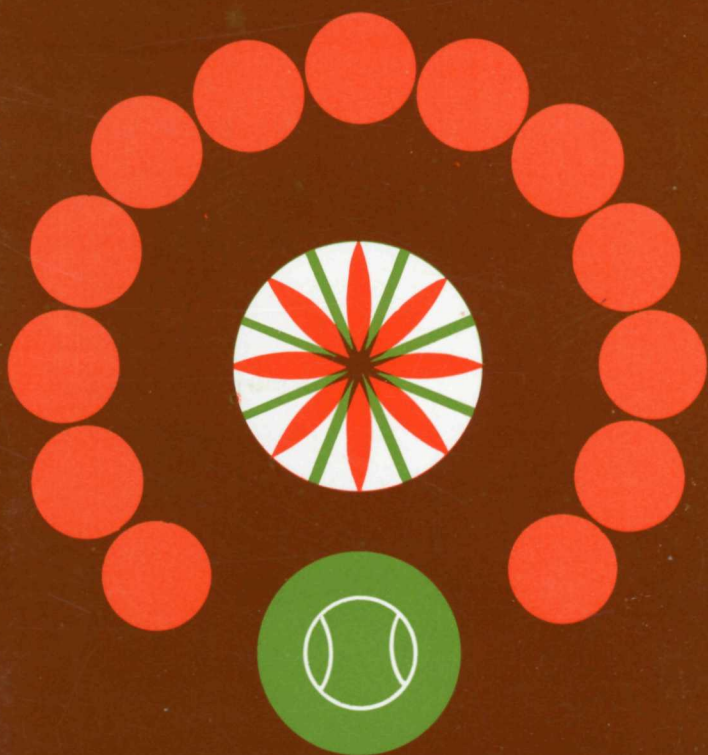


campfire programs



campfire programs

A Guide for Leaders of
Campfires in the National Parks

First edition, 1955, by H. Raymond Gregg

revised, 1968, by Douglass Hubbard and William W. Dunmire

National Park Service
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THE CAMPFIRE TRADITION

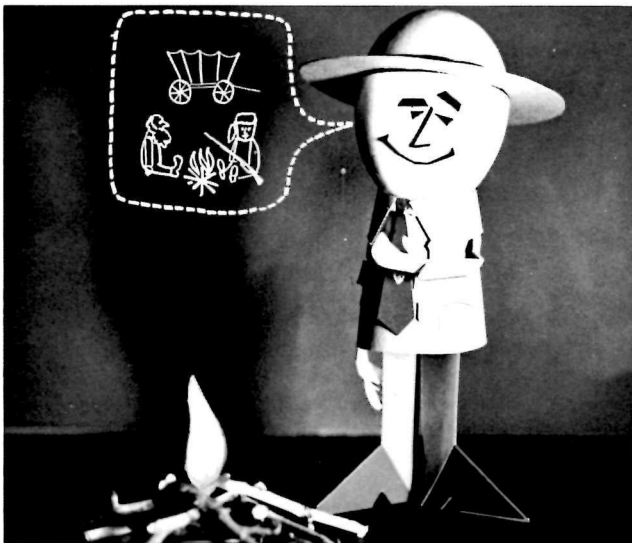
The glowing fire that dispelled the fearsome darkness also dissolved the real or fancied dangers that lurked about the camps of primitive man. Tamed by man, fire became a giver of security, making the night a time of rest, relaxation, and fellowship. Thus, the roots of the modern campfire tradition lie deep within the human race.

Tribal rituals centered about the ceremonial fire. Through the ages of history, the spiritual values of the family fireside gathering flourished. The spirit that made us a free people, and the genius and fortitude that produced our Nation owe much to the close social, intellectual, and spiritual intercourse around the family hearth at the close of day.

As the explorer and pioneer penetrated the American wilderness, the frontier campfire, from which our modern campfire program descended, came into being. Its cheerful flame and glowing coals were comfort by night on the westward march. By the end of World War I, when people were coming in numbers to the little-developed national parks, it had become a common practice for campers to gather about their neighbors' fires as night fell. There they told stories, sang, and enjoyed good fellowship.

With the advent of nature guides in the parks in the early 1920's, this impromptu custom grew into planned campfire assemblies. The first programs retained the flavor of group participation and the wilderness, formalized only in that a naturalist, ranger, or invited guest gave a talk or led a discussion upon some outdoor theme.

Today, campfire programs in the national parks, although they often have become refined and may attract huge audiences by yesterday's standards, remain a symbol of the bond between man and nature.



A CAMPFIRE PHILOSOPHY

The national park campfire provides an opportunity to weld the visitor's random experiences and impressions into an understanding and appreciation for the park's real values. Where other forms of interpretation deal with separate chapters of a park, the campfire program is uniquely suited to tie it all together into a comprehensive, meaningful story.

To illustrate, take a program titled, "Wildlife of X Park." In giving this talk, you of course would tell about representative animals and give some basic factual information about them. But more important here's the opportunity to relate animals to their environment and to each other, to make clear that individual species not only affect or are affected by one another, but also by the plants which grow about them, by the soil upon or within which they live, by climate factors, and by the cycle of the seasons. You would make it your goal to help visitors understand man's impact upon this intricately interrelated environment, so that they are aware of the influence that their presence, their actions, and their attitudes have upon the wildlife and upon the whole of nature.

You would include suggestions about where to find and how best to observe the wildlife and you would introduce local problems such as the effects of widely ranging park animals upon agriculture outside park boundaries to give understanding of the complexities of management and the reasons for park wildlife policy.

If your talk has been on track, by the end of the program you will have led visitors through a realm of thought much broader than factual information about the animals themselves. They will have seen the role and the relative importance of wildlife in the total resources of the area. From your presentation, they leave with a sense of having discovered new things of which they are a part and a beneficiary, and they will feel a responsibility, in which their voices can be heard.

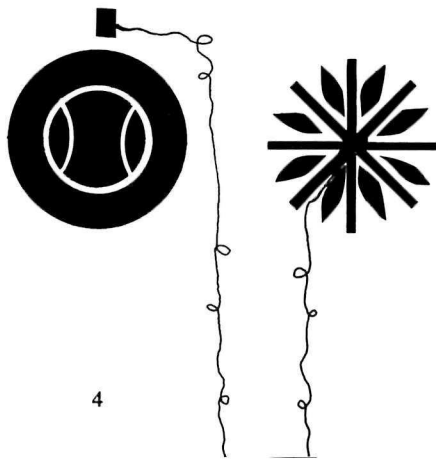
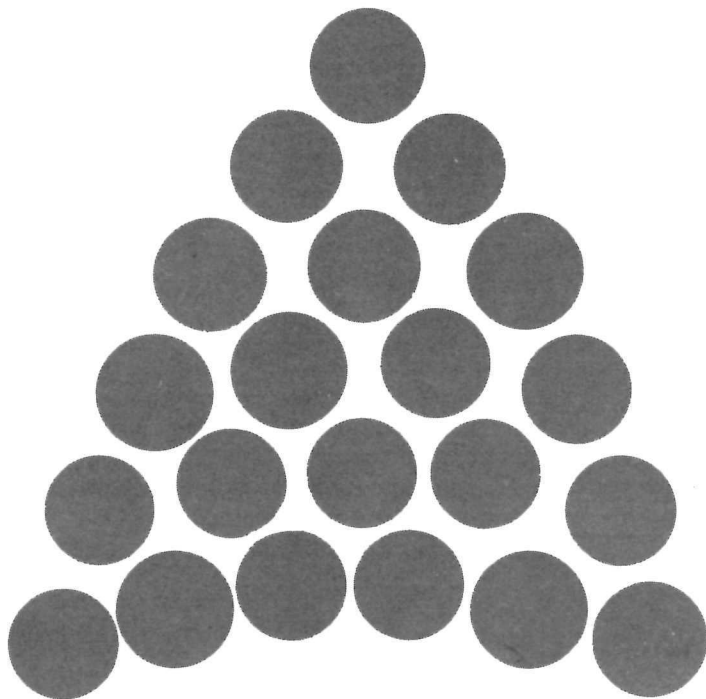
The campfire comes at a time of day when darkness limits the range of activities available to visitors. Often it is the only public function in the park during the evening hours. As such, it is an important social institution. The campfire circle serves as an evening community center where people gather to visit and enjoy each other's company as well as a medium for learning more about the park.

The atmosphere of natural beauty, a relaxed mood, and meditation at the day's end are all in your favor. Such conditions are ideal for broad themes such as the philosophy of parks and their intangible values. But, remember that vacationing visitors have little desire for grimly purposeful education. Without being conscious of it, however, they are easily led to what John Burroughs called "education by the way."

Most people are interested in what the park has to offer them or they would not be there; nor would they participate as they do in our evening program activities. So a well-conducted,

park-related program, presented by you, an interesting and informed person, is going to have ready acceptance by the majority of those in your audience.

In summary, your job as a campfire program leader will be to meet in an outdoor setting a group of visitors with diverse interests, and to establish a pleasant and receptive atmosphere for your message. In this climate, you will combine your enthusiasm and knowledge with the visitors' personal experiences and backgrounds into a perspective of what your park and the conservation ethic is all about.



THE SETTING

Fundamental physical elements of a campfire program are simple rustic facilities, a canopy of the skies, surroundings of wilderness or the camp environment, and, importantly, the light and animation of the campfire. On the human side, a pervading atmosphere of informality and fellowship, and a spirit of participation.

National Park Service campfire programs are conducted in two basic settings: the informal campfire where audiovisual aids are not used, and the larger, electrically equipped amphitheater employing projected illustrations and amplification.

The campfire circle. This may be a true campfire circle where seats are arranged around the firepit; or it may have a semicircular or cone-shaped arrangement. The facility may have no more than a firepit and logs or rocks for seating, although permanently placed wood seats are often provided. Seating capacity is rarely more than 150 persons.

The campfire itself is the focal point of these smaller facilities. With minimal artificial intrusions, the informal setting can come closest to re-creating the traditional American wilderness campfire. It encourages a give-and-take exchange of ideas between the speaker and his audience and a sense of participation among the listeners. There is greater opportunity here to incorporate the natural surroundings and the campfire itself into the body of the program. The speaker's goal should be to maintain a spirit of informality and spontaneity without giving the impression of disorganization.

Larger amphitheaters. Amphitheaters in the national parks are designed to retain the flavor of the natural outdoor environment, while providing an efficient facility for conducting interpretive programs for moderate-to-large audiences.

The physical arrangements in an amphitheater with a projection booth, screen, amplification system, and other elements required in presenting a program to the larger audience results in a more formal atmosphere. The screen and its housing tend to dominate, with the campfire playing a more secondary role. In the larger amphitheaters the campfire pit, off to the side of the stage, becomes a token; yet even in these larger installations the campfire should be used, if only for its symbolic value. In some areas where a live fire is precluded by lack of wood or extreme fire hazard conditions, a symbolic firepit with an artificial source of light has proved effective.

Visitors attending an amphitheater program expect a polished, professional presentation. That is not to say that it should be lacking in warmth or enthusiasm by the speaker—a formal lecture approach has no place in any of our campfire programs—but the audience, as spectators more than participants, should come away with the impression of having been to a carefully planned program. We are competing with highly sophisticated commercial media for the visitor's time; our standard of excellence must be high.

CONDUCTING THE PROGRAM

Your preparation. The organization and planning that goes in to any scheduled talk—indoor or outdoor—is just one element of preparing for a campfire program. That aspect is covered in *Talks*, another booklet in the Visitor Services Training Series. Here we are concerned with the broader overall management and presentation of a campfire program package, from the time the first visitor arrives until the last one departs.

There is a world of difference between desirable informality and undesirable lack of organization. Unplanned programs can become unwieldy for the leader and confusing to the audience. To run a smooth, informal campfire, you must do a lot of advance thinking about the content of your program and how to present it. Each part should contribute something definite to the whole. The program needs to move smoothly and logically toward a planned climax and conclusion. Here are examples of things to consider in the process of planning your program once its subject and purpose have been determined:

Is something needed to fill the time of the early arrivals?

Are you going to open with a flag ceremony, a firelighting, a simple friendly greeting, a lively story in the tradition of the region, or a challenging question to start your audience thinking in the vein of your subject?

Will you have community singing? If so, is it to promote fun and fellowship, or to set a mood for the message you have to bring, or both? What songs will best serve these purposes?

What announcements are important to the visitors' enjoyment and safety, or the protection of the area? When should they be given, and how can they best tie in to the program?

How will you lead up to the feature talk? How shall the program be brought to an effective close?

Then you must think of timing and physical arrangements. What time does it get dark enough for slide projection? What time is your program scheduled to start, and, by all means, when will it end? When will you need to arrive to lay the fire, to check the lighting system, to set up and adjust projection equipment, to make sure that any "props" are ready, and to see that the area is in neat order with everything ready to go?

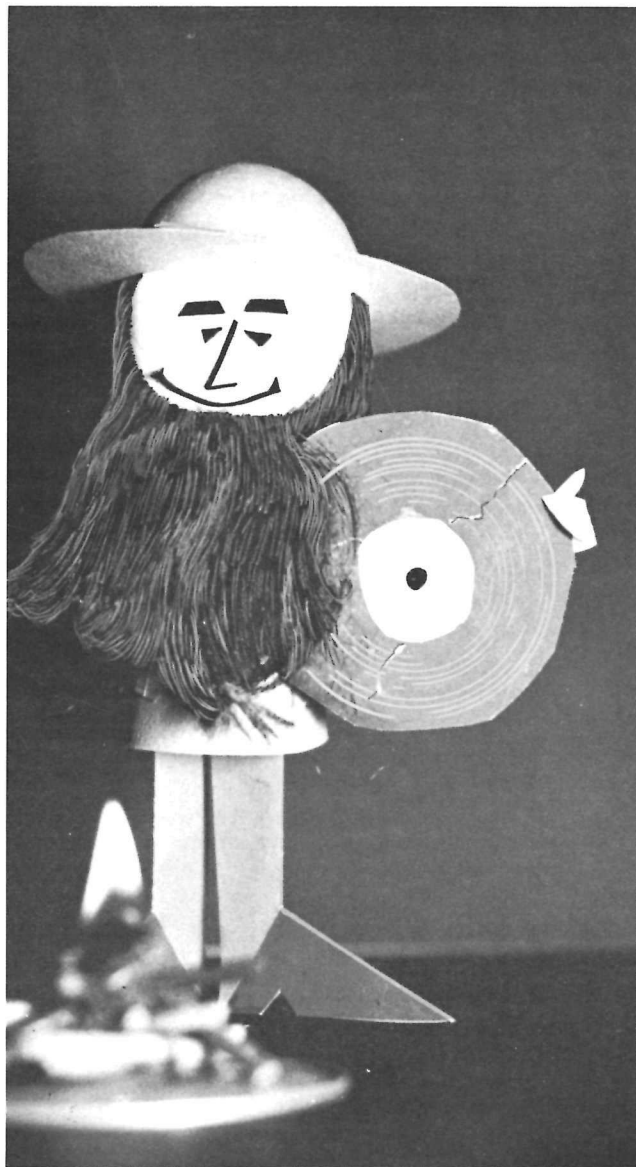
Most campfire programs have two basic components: the introductory period of "socializing" or group participation activities, and the program feature—usually a talk or demonstration. In addition, there may be planned preprogram and postprogram activities in which participation is optional. No rigid sequence of events must be followed in your campfire program; in fact, variation of the format may be desirable.

Musical prelude. Music is widely used at campfire programs. One use is the musical prelude. The playing of prerecorded music before the program has the advantage of letting people know that something is about to take place in the campfire area. Further, it provides an appropriate yet unobtrusive back-

ground while people are gathering. In this way, it won't restrict conversation among early arrivals.

But silence may be better than inappropriate music, chosen and played without thought to its effect. If you are going to use prelude music, select it either to fit the theme of the program, or to provide a relaxed atmosphere.

Choose light classical or semipopular music. Avoid selections with soft passages or loud crescendos. A word of caution: improving the public taste in music may be laudable, but campfires are not schools of music appreciation. Better stick with music that is somewhat familiar to your audience.



A glowing fire. Some leaders prefer to have the campfire going well in advance of program time. The sight of the fire and people gathering will attract campers or passersby who were unaware of the program. Others like to use the lighting of the fire, with or without ceremony such as whittling a "fuzzstick," as the opening event of the scheduled program.

If the feature of the program is an illustrated talk, it is well to time the starting of the fire and to use an amount of wood that will reduce the fire to glowing embers by the time projection begins. A bright blaze may cast disturbing reflections on the screen or be a distraction. Programs should end on a quiet note with which the dying embers harmonize.

You may add wilderness flavor and heighten interest with a ceremonial firelighting. Or accompany your firebuilding with a story of the association of primitive man with fire. Your emphasis may be upon how he made and used it. But by all means (and by the grace of the petroleum industry) make sure that a fire results from your efforts!

At least one person in uniform should be present at the campfire area well before the program is scheduled to begin. It may be the campground ranger, or the master of ceremonies if your program calls for one, or, in many cases, the scheduled speaker. He roves about the amphitheater area and its

approaches, greeting visitors as they arrive, engaging in conversation, and promoting a warm, friendly atmosphere.

One-man or two-man format? Amphitheater programs for the larger audiences often have a master of ceremonies in charge during the preprogram and introductory period followed by a speaker who gives the subject talk.

Using a master of ceremonies has real advantages: he can facilitate the mechanics of presentation, give variety to the program, set the mood, and help make the audience receptive to the speaker's message. Also, with a larger audience there is a greater likelihood of minor emergencies—lost children, unsupervised youngsters getting out of hand, and the like. The second man can act as a trouble shooter for unexpected disturbance without disrupting the program.

If you are giving the feature talk as well as acting as master of ceremonies, avoid long, pretalk discourse, since the very best voice has an audience-fatigue point. With a small audience, monotony of your voice can be reduced by encouraging visitor participation, and by maintaining a conversational rather than lecture tone.

Opening your program. In any case, you should have an exact time for beginning the planned program. Opening remarks traditionally are in the form of a welcome, identifying the program with the National Park Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior. But don't let it degenerate into a nightly parroting of an NPS "commercial." The spiel can be varied and may be given at any time during the program. Try to give it some warmth.

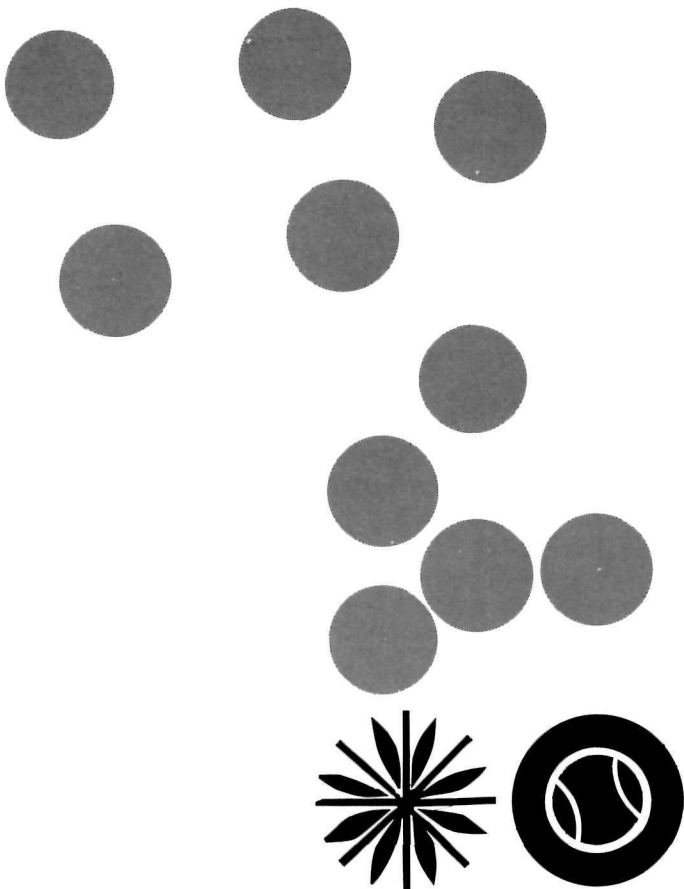
During the opening moments of the program, try to stir up interest in your subject with a brief anecdote, quotation, a challenging statement or question, or other device to stimulate thinking. Experienced campfire leaders often devote part of the introductory period to an informal discussion of some common visitor question or experience.

Some leaders use the technique of bringing up an item of current interest to break the ice at the start of their program. If it relates to the subject of the evening, so much the better. Here is one example of this approach.

How many of you hiked up to Old Baldy today? Well, then you probably saw the freshly fallen tree across the trail—felled by lightning during a storm last week. Many folks ask about the incidence of lightning in the high country, so you might be interested in what our park fire-tower observers have reported so far this summer . . .

The content of such a discourse may be designed to correct a common misconception, fill in information "blind spots," or lead the audience into a thinking pattern that relates to the evening's subject.

Following an afternoon storm, a ranger at an informal campfire in Yosemite used another approach. He had a flair for reading and presented John Muir's poetic description of an



afternoon shower. Those around the fire sat spellbound, hearing words describing their own experience a few hours earlier. With that, the program featuring the resources and benefits of the Yosemite back country was off to certain success.

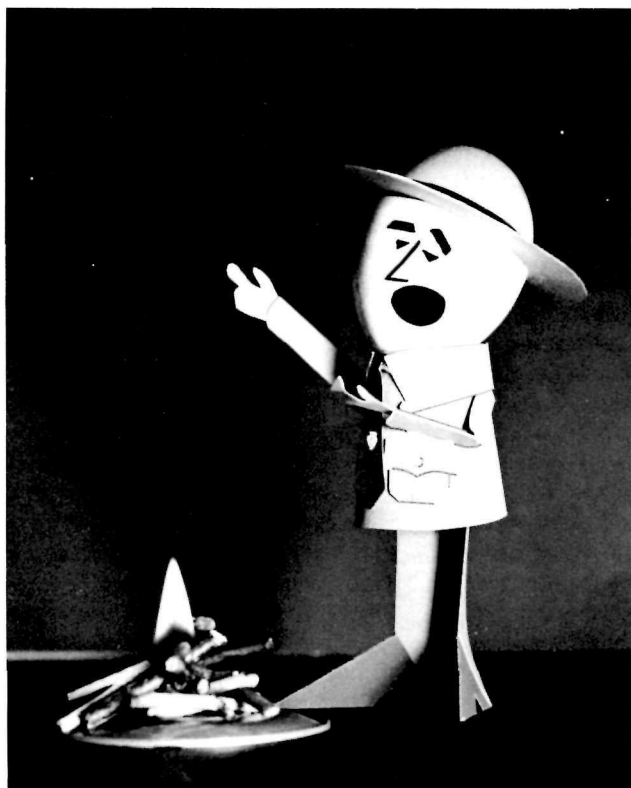
The program format may provide only a very brief introductory period—barely time for a welcome, an ice breaker, and perhaps an announcement or two—before the formal talk is scheduled to begin. Or you may be expected to devote considerable time—up to 30 minutes—on pretalk activities. This is often the case where the program begins well before it is dark enough for slide projection.

Community singing, park-related anecdotes, question-and-answer sessions, interviews, and demonstrations are all used as socializing devices during this period. It's best to maintain an informal, personal atmosphere.

To sing or not to sing? Community singing is a fine way to establish informality and good fellowship. Leadership is the key to success here.

To become a good song leader, there is no substitute for experience. A fair singing voice helps, but is not by any means essential. More important is an enthusiastic manner and self-confidence. Both are products of experience.

The leader's important functions are to set a proper pitch, to establish and maintain a rhythm appropriate to the song,



and to present the song in a manner which will encourage participation.

Most leaders find it best to pitch the song somewhat lower than usually written in songbooks. You may want to hum the starting pitch to yourself to establish the proper key.

The song leader must be just that—a leader. He starts the song and maintains the rhythm, usually by beating time. This should be done so all can see. A good way to achieve competence is to practice beating out standard 2, 3, and 4-beat rhythms. These are not difficult and will help you lead almost any song likely to be sung at a campfire.

A common difficulty in community singing is the tendency to sing too slowly. As a rule, start the song at a somewhat faster tempo than usual.

You don't have to sing the entire song, but you must at least start it, in order to set the key and encourage audience participation. From time to time, join again to start a less familiar verse or phase, or to whip up the tempo. But avoid drowning out the audience by the power of your sound system. Back away from the mike!

The campfire program is no place to try to teach groups to sing new or unfamiliar tunes. Old favorite songs or parodies of them are the most satisfactory. People enjoy what they can do well. Simple stunt, or participation, songs are ordinarily well received, especially those with well-known tunes.

Use of song slides increases audience participation and lightens your burden. The National Song Slide Service, Inc., 42 West 48th Street, New York, N.Y. 10036, will mail a catalog of their available song titles on request. Some parks prefer to produce their own slides. White-on-black lettering is preferable as it eliminates screen glare.

A note of caution—community singing can be overdone. In any audience there are always some who won't be swept with enthusiasm in song, who will be silently wishing for you to get on to the next part of the program. Group singing should usually not exceed 10 or 15 minutes of program time.

And don't fall into the trap of accepting a volunteer song leader from your audience. He could be great. But more likely, he will be hard to turn off or want to do songs that are inappropriate or offensive.

A final word—if you have never led group singing before, seek out someone who has and get him to give you pointers. Before your program, of course.

The interview. The conversation, or interview, is another feature that can be effectively used in the pretalk portion of a campfire. An "old timer," such as a settler or pioneer resident of the region or a person who visited the park at some early stage of its existence, who has a talent for telling a story, may be willing to contribute. Careful advance discussion and preparation is important to avoid rambling discourses on trivialities or uninteresting personal memoirs by the guest.

A noted historian, conservationist, or a prominent public official with an interest in park matters and talent for public speaking may be in the area and willing to participate in a brief discussion of something compatible with the evening's subject or of general interest to the audience.

There are also good opportunities for interviews with local park officials. Your superintendent might be interviewed on Service policy and administrative problems. A ranger might discuss protection of the park and the visiting public, an acute current fire hazard and the necessity for public cooperation during the emergency period, or matters such as back-country manners, safe driving, or hiking and climbing practices.

Or a ranger could be interviewed on some recently publicized event in the park. For example, if there has been a rescue of a stranded climber or a climbing accident, a conversation with one of the rangers or other persons in the rescue party might bring out tactfully both the pleasure in mountain climbing and the tragic results of improper equipment and carelessness.

A brief interview with the leader of tomorrow's conducted trip is far more effective than a terse announcement of the event by the master of ceremonies. Similar stimulus to trail use or back-country travel can be provided by inviting someone who has made an interesting climb or who has traveled to a seldom-visited part of the park.

Questions and answers. Effective question-and-answer sessions require skill on the part of the campfire leader. It is not a case of merely asking "Does anyone have any questions?" You should know what kind of things visitors ask about most often and be able by some comment or provocative statement to invite further inquiries from your audience.

Be sure everyone hears questions or comments from the audience. If there is any doubt, repeat or paraphrase what has been said. The same is true for discussions or interviews with invited guests.

To sustain interest, and to draw more audience contributions, maintain a rapid pace. Answers to questions should never be lengthy.

The leader who invites questions from the audience must be prepared for difficult, sometimes controversial subjects. A solid understanding of local park and servicewide policies is required for an adequate answer. For this reason question-and-answer sessions are not recommended for first-year seasonal employees. The common practice is to invite visitors who have questions to remain after the program.

Announcements, such as program activities, and protection and safety messages, are usually presented during the introductory period. They should be held to a minimum. Avoid long run-downs of the interpretive activities, for an audience will not remember more than one or two.

Slides of places to visit or people doing things can give impact to your announcements. A slide of an inviting forest, followed by a fire scene, then one of a fire-devastated area

will surely drive home your words of caution about prevailing high fire danger. "Before-and-after" scenes of a littered roadside camp or picnic site can point up your plea for cooperation in maintaining a cleaner park.

Don't create an anticlimax with announcements and admonitions at the close of the program. If you are resourceful, you can spread your announcements through the program tying them in with your subject.

Pretalk summary. In all cases, exercise judgment in selecting material and allotting time to entertainment features. Remember, it is better to seek your talent than to accept what comes too easily.

You can enter into the spirit of wholesome fun during community singing or while presenting tall stories or homespun tales and still retain control, as long as you use good sense and good timing. Neither drag things out nor drag them down. There is no place for improprieties or the risqué by you or anyone else on your program. A humorous song or story may fall flat, but as long as it is in good taste it will not evoke resentment.

Naturalness is one of your most priceless possessions. What fits on another may look mighty bad on you. Find your own style and stick to it. If you have no talent for humor, then stay serious in the most pleasant possible way. While good humor helps, people don't have to laugh their way through an evening to have an enjoyable time.

The talk. At a small, informal campfire the skillful direction of discussion, conversation, and other activities may be such that the evening flows without perceptible distinction between introductory and feature portions of the program. With larger audiences, 20 to 40 minutes is usually devoted to a well-defined feature talk or demonstration.

Again, your presentation must be carefully planned, well-organized. This and other important elements of public speaking are discussed thoroughly in *Talks*, which should be perused with care when you are developing your program.

One important point made in *Talks* bears repeating here. The talk should possess narrative quality, cohesiveness, and a definite climax. A good illustrated talk is one that could be interesting and complete without the illustrations. The pictures should illustrate your talk, rather than the talk being a series of captions for beautiful photos. The latter may draw "oohs" and "ahs," but in the end fall short of your responsibility to present a meaningful story.

In choosing slides for an evening campfire, keep in mind that light conditions for outdoor projection are not likely to be ideal. With daylight saving time in effect almost nationwide in summer, chances are your talk will be scheduled to start before it is completely dark. Rear-screen projection, which is becoming the standard for Park Service amphitheaters, helps to overcome light problems. Needless to say, all slides should

be of excellent quality. Beware of using even slightly under-exposed slides in the early, twilight part of the program.

There are times and places where a professional sound motion picture is appropriate at campfires. An introduction to relate the film to the area is important; you may want to alert the audience for key scenes or passages.

The ideal program ending brings the principal feature of the evening to a logical climax. For example, a talk on geology might be concluded with a brief recapitulation of the geological events and their influence upon the present landscape. And the vastness of time and the insignificance of the span of human history might be reemphasized. From this theme can be imparted a greater appreciation of the visible scenery.

Whatever the subject, your summary should flow smoothly. Occasionally the close of a talk may be tied into a program announcement such as: "Now I wish you a pleasant night's rest before the hike to Reflection Lake tomorrow, where we will see many of the wildflowers we have talked about tonight." But beware of routine "commercials" that divert the audience from the frame of thinking developed in your talk.

Where the program feature is a discussion of some major problem or philosophy, try to convince the audience that the problem is one that affects them personally. But let them draw their own conclusions; any effort to tell them what to do, what to think, how to feel may destroy the effect.

After the program. Your talk is never the last word. If it is worth its salt, it will arouse questions and stimulate interest. Sometime during the evening you should have let your listeners know that they are welcome to ask questions after the program. But if your presentation has not raised questions or whetted appetites, let it go. Most people prefer to depart on the high note of the program's close. Avoid obligating them to remain out of courtesy through a question period that may deal with things in which they have no special interest.

A small circle of visitors will often gather about the speaker without special invitation after the program. Some want to compliment you on your talk. Once in a while one wants to correct what he considers an error or to relate experiences recalled by your talk. An occasional visitor wants to know how to get a job as a ranger. Others dislike seeing anything end.

After the program, be courteous and reasonably available to those who stay to talk to you. Create an air of dispatch, to enable you to serve all who are seeking your assistance. Address your replies both to the inquirer and the group, to make it clear that your service is for everyone. As you dispose of each question, quickly focus attention on the next inquirer and take up his question, in turn including the group in your reply. But the time-consuming type of person will usually stay to the bitter end. You may have to extricate yourself from him in a courteous but expeditious manner.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Demonstrations can be a most exciting feature of an evening program. How-to-do-it interpretation is particularly effective through demonstrations. In areas where camping, fishing, boating, or mountaineering are popular, occasional demonstrations of these activities are very appropriate at the campfire.

For example, visiting experts or qualified local people can be invited to demonstrate casting techniques, baits, equipment, and other aspects of fishing. Such a presentation might include slides or motion pictures of park waters, kinds of fish, and habitats, or skills such as tying flies and fishermen's knots.

Another program might be devoted to a demonstration of camping skills and equipment. This may be accompanied by slides of things that cannot be demonstrated readily at the campfire program, such as suitable sites for camps and camp sanitation. Such a program can add to the quality and enjoyment of use by campers and stimulate a new interest on the part of others. But in general such special-interest demonstrations are more often used as short introductory presentations, since they have a narrow audience appeal.

In many parks, rangers present demonstrations during the pre-talk portion of the campfire, usually to cover some aspect of ranger work. For example, during times of high fire danger, the necessity for caution and the effects of fire can be dramatized by a demonstration of fire-fighting equipment. Or the pleasures and hazards of mountain climbing can be described through a demonstration of climbing and mountain-rescue equipment. Usually, in the feature talk, there will be opportunities to refer to the subject of the demonstration.

In several areas, park rangers periodically team up to present a comprehensive demonstration of their work as the feature program. It has become one of the most popular campfires and is an excellent way to sell the public on the importance of protecting park values.

Such a program might open with a brief talk about qualifications, recruitment, training, and the organization of rescue equipment and techniques. Winter activities and back-country operations could be covered. With a cooperative horse or mule one of the rangers may demonstrate packing techniques. Simulated fire detection and dispatching demonstrations may follow, communicating by radio with a fire lookout, the dispatcher's office, or other field stations.

The program may end with a demonstration of fire-fighting equipment, perhaps with a dramatic finale such as the suppression of a controlled fire or action display of portable pumps or a pumper truck.

Star-gazing. If there is good visibility of the sky from the campfire area or from an open place nearby which is easily and safely reached at night, you might consider star observation for an occasional postprogram activity. This is a natural for campfire audiences and is fun besides.

The star-gazing postlude should be announced earlier in the program, then, without fanfare other than perhaps a reminder, follow a break at the end of the campfire program. In this way those who are not interested may leave. The star session should be limited to about 15 minutes; if longer, it will attract fewer people and exceed the interest span of most.

Regardless of your previous knowledge of astronomy, you can readily develop a fund of adequate information. Journals such as *Science News Letter* and *Natural History Magazine* carry articles on astronomy, usually with diagrams. Two good books are available. *Stars*, by H. S. Zim and R. H. Baker (Golden Guide Nature Series), is an easily understood guide with star maps and constellation diagrams. *The Stars—A New Way to See Them*, by H. A. Rey (Houghton-Mifflin), deals with constellations in greater depth and with excellent graphics. Also available from bookstores are several types of disc and other star-finding devices which can be very useful.

A good pointer-type flashlight is probably the single best aid for identifying to your audience the positions of constellations, individual stars, or planets.

As with any program, you should follow a preplanned sequence in conducting a star-gazing session. When your group has gathered, explain what you are going to cover, then limit your discussion to easily seen constellations or stars. Your goals should be to create an awareness of the night skies and to stimulate interest for those who camp.



SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Regardless of the format of your programs, you as the leader must firmly establish and maintain control throughout. You must be alert to disturbances and intrusions, and move quickly, calmly, and decisively, but with tact, to meet every situation. A program out of hand is a program lost.

Where parts of the program are presented by others, bear your position of host with dignity and geniality, but retain control over what the guest presents. Control is not a matter of iron discipline. You shouldn't object to an amusing spontaneous happening during the program. Ride with such things and exercise your leadership by joining in the spirit of the group. You will be more successful leading it back into the planned course by deflection than by head-on force.

The unexpected. Do not let the planned program become a sacred cow, lest it end up a dead one. If a deer or a bear unexpectedly walks into view, you can be sure that it will immediately capture the attention of your audience—over anything you may be saying. So take advantage of this bit of serendipity and improvise—with information about the animal's habits from your store of natural history tidbits. Maybe your talk about it will send the animal on its way quickly. Usually it won't linger long, whatever you say. Then work your way back from wildlife to whatever you were discussing. If much of a delay has been caused, drop from the program some part which is least essential. It is better to have a audience fresh for the climax, however faithfully you have given them the full works as scheduled.

Children. They can be a problem—or an asset—at a campfire. In general, you will have better luck with them if you include them and use them. They like to feel noticed, that they have a part in things. If you pitch at least part of what you say to the youngsters, it will help hold their interest. And you will find that most adults also enjoy and appreciate things spoken for the child.

You can get the children on your team by letting them help with little odds and ends of preparation. When you can, spend a little time with them in "kid talk" before the program; build up their interest in what is to follow, and guide them into cooperative conduct during the program. The more informal pretalk part of your campfire, too, can well be directed partly toward the youngsters.

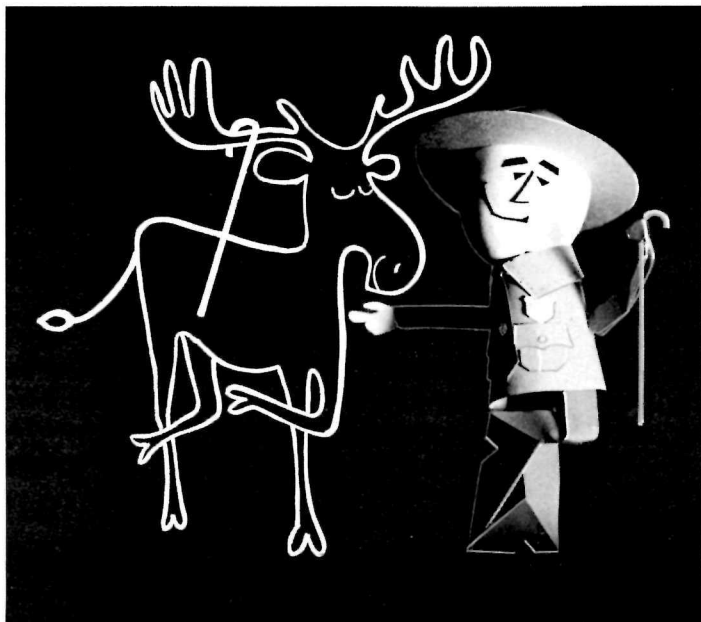
Children like to sit in the first few rows of seats. When they get restless, children usually will quiet quickly if a man in uniform sits at the end of their row of seats or picks out the ringleader and asks him to sit with his parents or go back to his camp. At all costs, avoid scolding them from the platform. You will be embarrassed and you will lose an otherwise friendly audience if you do!

Disturbances and emergencies. Any serious disturbance arising within the audience should be corrected without delay. You

may hesitate to offend anyone, but to remain oblivious to loud talk, noise, or other disturbance is an offense against the audience because it interferes with their enjoyment of the program. This situation does not arise often, but when it does, prompt, tactful, and quiet action should be taken, preferably by someone who is not on stage.

Most big troubles are groups of little ones or are little ones blown up through neglect. Do your best to keep cool and collected whatever happens. You can best do this by forethought and preparation. Know the answers to questions such as: What do I do if a sudden thunderstorm arises? What if someone faints or has an epileptic spell during the program? How will I handle a drunk and disorderly person? What do I do if the power fails? How will I react if someone in the audience openly challenges something I say? What if a child falls in the fire pit? What will I say to calm things down if some woman screams "mouse!"?

Some of these things may sound silly, but they all have happened at National Park Service campfires. And similar problems could happen to you. You are responsible for the comfort and safety of your audience as well for their entertainment and inspiration. You must protect and care for your equipment in emergencies. You must know that there is firmness, not mushiness in the "soft word that turneth away wrath." Above all, you must be quick and equal to any situation. All of this comes of good organization, planning, and teamwork when there are two or more of you assigned to the program. You may resent it if a visitor, confused by your uniform, asks if you are a scoutmaster; but take a page from the scouting book—be prepared!



THE BETTER LEADER

You are living in the age of *Cinerama*, *The Living Desert*, and *The Vanishing Prairie*—the nature spectacular. Through TV your public is massaged almost daily with superb photographs and graphic techniques. No longer can you get by with a pedestrian discussion and a set of "pretty good" slides.

The single purpose of the whole interpretive program in the parks is the achieving of a special kind of quality worthy of the resources we interpret. What we *do* have that Disney or Cinerama does not have is *you*. You, who are there, with the opportunity to make a living experience of your program. Helped by your pictures—yes. But still it is you, telling fascinating things from personal knowledge and experience, something an impersonal medium like a film, however good, can never do. The coming of the nature film era has not sounded the death knell of the campfire programs—but merely that of the lazy or substandard campfire leader.

But don't overrate yourself. "Pride goeth before a fall" is old but true. It isn't you as an individual that counts so much here, but rather what you give and what you represent. However popular you become as a speaker, however great your persuasive powers, you are but a vessel for more meaningful things you can bring to people—a love and understanding of nature and of country; a pride in that which demands preservation; and new horizons for richer, fuller living.

Approach each campfire, then, as a challenge—a challenge to make this your best program ever. But in making it so, remain humble, always open to new ideas for betterment, always receptive to growth. You *can* be the better leader.



10 WAYS TO KILL YOUR CAMPFIRE PROGRAM

1. Avoid preparation and planning like the plague—its too confining. Let your program motto be, “Play it all by ear.”
2. Arrive exactly at program time or, preferably, a little late. If you must get there beforehand, stay aloof from arriving campers: pretend to check your equipment, look busy, hide in the booth—anything to avoid friendly contact.
3. For the musical prelude, dig up the park’s scratchiest worn-out records or tapes and play them at top volume. Select preprogram material for extremes in taste—rock-and-roll or an avante-guard 12-tone heavy will do nicely.
4. Gauge your fire building for maximum smoke during the slide show. An extra heap of green wood just before you’re on-stage helps.
5. Open your program with a swinging statement such as, “Does anyone have any questions while we’re waiting for it to get dark enough to show slides?”
6. If you lead singing, pick little-known songs that run on and on. Convey somehow that you really don’t enjoy song leading, but that it was scheduled and you had no choice. (If you’re a supervisor, insist that *everyone* on your staff be a song leader—like it or not.)
7. Think “lecture,” not “talk.” Let it be a catalog of facts, and don’t omit a detail. Never relate what you say to the personal experience of your audience; at all costs avoid an ecological approach.
8. Don’t hesitate to show dark slides when light conditions for projecting are marginal. Use of dirty, out-of-focus, and otherwise poor-quality slides also will help further your image as a campfire killer.
9. Ignore potential trouble spots. Never plan ahead for emergencies. No matter what happens as the evening progresses, stick to an established rigid program format.
10. Decide from the outset that you’re not cut out for leading campfires.

