



What August Camp Has Done for Me

By M. GERTRUDE GOULD

*First prize essay in "The Dominie's"
August Camp contest, June 1936*

THE two short words "August Camp" present a clear, vivid picture to my mind. I see a highland meadow drenched with sun, tents gleaming white against a background of green trees; behind them, encircling mountains. No movement disturbs the peaceful scene; for it is mid-afternoon, before the campers have returned from their day's activities. I do not know why this particular picture of August camp is the first to be recalled, unless because I saw it when arriving for my initial venture upon this form of vacation.

August camp is much, much more than that. It consists of various moods, has as many facets as a finely cut jewel. There are the mornings. I lie in my cot waiting for the call to rise, hearing the movements of those who try so hard to disguise them; and know that a few hardy souls are about to take a cold plunge in the stream which is one requisite of an August camp. Soon the signal is given: no longer must quiet be maintained; all is bustle and stir, for August campers by tradition are on time for breakfast! What is the reason for such promptness? Is the air so stimulating that one feels like being up and doing? Or do we sleep so well that we wake more refreshed than usual? Is it because every day holds promise of pleasures too good to be

missed? Are the appetizing qualities of an ample breakfast the magnet? Here, indeed, is no dry toast and black coffee introduction to the day! I suspect that all combine to bring a full quota of campers to the table.

One may shiver a bit in the cool morning air, and be grateful for a wool collar to pull about the throat; but soon the sun rises above the hills, and one's faith is justified that the day will be warm.

Breakfast over, the real work of the day begins with simple housekeeping, such as sweeping or bed making. Besides these ordinary duties, one may add to the tent equipment a hanging shelf, a tripod for a wash stand, poles upon which clothes can be placed. Water must be brought from the brook. Always there is washing to do. And, most important, the ladies must put up the lunches.

Did I say, "most important"? Well, perhaps it is the most important task; but certainly not the most difficult. For that is choosing, from the two or three or more alluring offerings of the day, the trip that one will most enjoy. Who are the leaders? Where are one's friends going? And, most decisive factor, which can one best do? For it is the wise August camper who discovers his limitations and keeps within them, thus conserving his own energy and not demanding too much help from the leader.

Just a word to those who have yet to know what August Camp can do for one. It is not too strenuous for the healthy and active person. If you are slow, go with the slow group. If your muscles are not already hardened, go with the slow group. If you are tired, go with the slow group. My own experience has been that always there is someone who is slower, less fit, and more tired, than I.

Of course the trips constitute the chief diversion and feature of August camp. Each morning, we fill several automobiles and ride over good mountain highways or poor back roads to the point from which we start the tramp or climb. To describe the outings in detail would be impossible in the scope of this paper. The mental images thus evoked are too many and too varied. Certain days and events stand out because they were most greatly enjoyed. It is strange that one forgets the unpleasant: the weary and hot ascent by a trail exposed to sun,

without the welcome shade of trees; the slippery descent over a path that seems to be a brook bed with rocks covered with moss. One remembers, rather, the moments of ecstasy: the mother partridge and her brood not at all dismayed by the advancing horde of trampers; the sudden vista into the valley floor; from the summit a hawk circling below, or peaks piled upon peaks against the horizon; the rare flowers, the scarlet of cardinal in a brown brook, the equally vivid coral root—to see, to admire, to exclaim over—and to leave, unplucked! Who shall say what day, what trip, brought the greatest pleasure: the easy, gradual ascent up Osceola? the shaded paths, the sudden pools and waterfalls, of the green Ammonoosuc? Nor can these supplant in our affection the two day trip to Galehead Camp, South Twin, and Garfield. What fun to help build the fireplace, to bring wood, and to watch the details of outdoor cooking! All long to be remembered August days, red letter days.

To the reader who interjects "What do you do when it rains?" I reply that even a rainy time at camp may bring unexpected pleasures. For rain does swell the brooks, and creates waterfalls where but a short few hours before there had been only a trickle. On such an occasion, everyone donned suitable gear, from rubber hats, coats, boots, parkas, to bathing suits; and ventured forth to Bog Brook and Georgiana Falls. That same summer, when camp was located near a small and little used inn, a rainy day passed quickly and happily in games, charades, and dancing.

We do, of course, hope that we may have generally pleasant weather, so that we may indulge in our favorite sport of mountaineering. The climb over, everyone hurries back to camp for the refreshment of a bath in the brook, a rub with soap and towel, the luxury of clean clothes. How is it that such cold water can take out so much stiffness? To that question I have not yet found a satisfactory answer.

Dinner is one of the big events of the day. What resourceful cooks are ours, who can evolve, from a fireplace and reflector ovens, such culinary triumphs! Laughter and merriment would help in digestion, were aid needed; but it is not.

Twilight and evening usher in the campfire. To this each camper brings steamer rugs and sweaters (for the cool comes early) and arranges his chairback in the front row, near the

blaze, or at the rear, where he may observe the others. The entertainment may be impromptu; but it is nevertheless enjoyed. There is singing, or story-telling, or a bit about the history of the region. Poems may be read. It is always quiet and peaceful, an appropriate end for an active day.

During the night there is nothing to break the quiet except, perhaps, the whistle of the freight puffing up the valley; nothing to look out upon save the velvet blackness of the August sky.

So far I have not spoken of the human element. That one's companions may add greatly to the pleasure of the day, or detract much from it, goes without saying. This is true: that August camp brings out the best in one, or shows the least attractive traits. One learns quickly who will wait for the slower climber, who will help at hard places; who will complain at minor discomforts, who will require more than his share of attention. At which the philosopher will say "August camp is just like life anywhere."

The joys of August camp do not cease when the month is over. We return to a city existence with lessened weight and quickened step, recreated in body and mind. Even years afterward, when I ride through Franconia Notch, I think of the day when I walked near the noble forehead of the Old Man of the Mountains, or tramped the peaks crowned by majestic Lafayette. From Crawford, I raise my eyes to Willey, to the precipices of Webster Cliffs, and say to myself: "I have stood there. I have been behind the ranges."

These, and many more, are the remembered yesterdays of August Camp. I feel sure that it will do for others what it has done for me in the way of rest and happiness.