

EUROPEAN Camps

Diverse Programs,
Common Goals



warm

July

night . . .

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... hundreds of thousands of American children are asleep in their cabins, lodges, and tents. Across the Atlantic, their European cousins are experiencing their own camp traditions — in a castle in County Kildare, Ireland, at a small resort in a Romanian forest, and on the Gulf of Corinth in Greece.

International Camping Congress

October 12-16, 2005
Mexico City

Members of the Asociacion Mexicana de Campamentos, assisted by the Venezuelan Camping Association and the Colombian Camping Association, are making preparations for the Seventh International Camping Congress in Mexico City, October 12-16, 2005. The Congress theme, "Preserve the Treasures, Enrich Young Lives," will feature an opening ceremony at the Palace of Fine Arts, followed by a special performance by the National Folkloric Ballet, educational sessions, plenary session speakers, a fiesta, exhibits, research forum, and a bus tour to Valle de Bravo for camp tours, activity workshops, and a volcano hike. Most importantly, the International Congress provides a unique opportunity to share experiences and ideas with camp professionals from six continents.

The Hotel Sheraton Historico will serve as the venue for the Congress, with accommodations available in hotels in various price ranges. A first-time event — a full-day Counselors' Workshop — is scheduled for October 15 at Xochitla (place of flowers), a research and educational facility northwest of Mexico City. Xochitla, which hosts sixty thousand children each year in environmental programs, is also a botanical garden, conference center, and park.

The International Camping Fellowship (ICF) was founded in 1987 at the Second International Camping Congress in Washington, D.C., which was held in conjunction with the American Camp Association Conference. Since its inception, ICF has co-sponsored Congresses in Canada, Russia, Japan, and Australia — with 300-700 participants at each event, representing as many as twenty countries.

Preliminary information, including the fee schedule with adjusted rates for students, is found on the Web site, www.iccmexico2005.com and the ICF Web site, www.campingfellowship.org. Speaker proposals and questions may be directed to Linda Pulliam, acavirginias@acacamps.org or 919-603-0317.

An Evolving Camp Tradition

For many Europeans, the description of an American summer camp seems foreign and slightly exotic. Yet, in most European countries, there are examples of youth programs that closely resemble those found in North American camps but are often known by other names — such as the "colonie des vacances" provided for all French children, sports and language centers in Switzerland, or programs operated by the Boy Scouts or Girl Guides.

The New York Times reported in a May, 2004, article, "A New Concept for

Britain: Summer Camp," that "summer camp is still an unfamiliar concept here, something Britons tend to know better from imported teen movies than from experience." This is one example of the misperception that camps are rare in Europe. The British Activity Holiday Association (BAHA) contends that there are many summer camps in the United Kingdom with large numbers of children in attendance although accurate statistics are not available. The concept of children and camping dates back at least to Lord Baden Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts

in 1908 in England, and many more camps began operation in the United Kingdom at the end of World War II. In fact, the development of camps in Japan, Malaysia, and Hong Kong can be traced to the British training of educators in the late 1940s.

According to BAHA, British parents are seeking one- or two-week summer programs where their children can enjoy themselves in a safe environment. About twelve years ago, a canoeing accident in southern England resulted in the deaths of four teenagers. As a result, legislation was introduced to require companies offering mountaineering, caving,

trekking, and water sports to be licensed by the government. A study last year commissioned by Britain's education department determined that 60 percent of British youth reported not having enough to do in the summer. The department is devising a pilot program, funded by lottery money, to determine whether publicly financed summer camps might function in Great Britain.

Serious Fun at the Barretstown Gang Camp, Ireland

Barretstown Castle in County Kildare provides a scenic backdrop for children involved in all of the typical activities that make camp memorable — ponies, sports, an adventure course, giant tower, theater, and creative workshops — but this camp is far from typical. Founded in 1994 by Actor Paul Newman in a castle donated by the Irish government, the camp has served over 10,000 children with cancer and other serious illnesses. Director Terry Dignant describes the program as "serious fun," and the smiles of the children indicate that the element of fun permeates all of the activities. The therapeutic emphasis of the program is carried out through a model of Challenge > Success > Reflection = Discovery. Children meet challenges with success, reflect on their experiences, and make life-changing discoveries of self-esteem, confidence, independence, trust, coping skills, and friendships. Every effort is made to make the camp both accessible and inclusive.

Barretstown operates from early spring through late fall in ten-day sessions. Children ages seven to seventeen with cancer and other serious diseases come from countries all over Europe, with all expenses covered including transportation and medical care. The multi-lingual staff — called *caras*, the Irish word for friend — provide supervision in a 1:2 ratio. Two pediatric oncologists and four pediatric nurses are equipped in the "Med Shed" to administer chemotherapy, inhalation therapy, blood studies, as well as the inevitable first aid required in any camp. Newly developed programs also focus on the impact of serious illness on the entire family, with weekend camps for families and special bereavement camps. Ongoing research is measuring the effects of the camp experience on children diagnosed with a serious illness.

To provide Barretstown's program at no fee to the families and to maintain the

extensive facilities, a sophisticated fund development effort is required — which keeps Terry flying around Europe and the U.S. The camp celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2004 with the help of founder Paul Newman and celebrities such as Paul McCartney, Heather Mills, and U2's The Edge. For more information on Barretstown Gang Camp, see www.barretstowngc.ie.

Dracula's Transylvanian Castle

What's a parent to do? Physicians Radu and Lavinia Zernoveanu wanted their eight-year-old son to experience summer camp, a long-standing Romanian tradition. However, they found that, since the 1989 revolution, the state-owned camps had fallen into disrepair, lacked supervision, and with the removal of the communist ideological content, offered little substantive program. With a desire for high professional standards and the goals of developing communications, socialization, and team building for their campers, the Zernoveanus established Camp Mastermind three years ago. In preparation, they purchased many books from the American Camp Association and visited camps throughout Europe. The restructuring of Romanian society has resulted in financial challenges for all citizens. Physicians are underpaid, so Radu had begun working with a pharmaceutical firm and received training in the UK as a corporate trainer. With the expertise he gained as a team builder, he felt that it was a logical step to becoming a camp director.

Situated 180 km from Bucharest — not far from Dracula's Poenari Stronghold — the camp is currently based at a small hotel, but property has been purchased for a permanent site and construction of the camp will begin soon. Children live in Cumpana huts with bathrooms and two or three beds to a room — eating nutritious meals at the hotel's restaurant, swimming in the pontoon swimming pool, and boating on Vidraru Lake. Although the camp program has been designed on an American camp model, a focus on competition is inherent in the Romanian tradition. Children are divided into teams and participate in competitions throughout the session with diplomas and prizes on the last day.

Approximately 150 state-owned camps are still in operation in Romania, giving many children the opportunity to attend a summer camp at a very low rate of about \$100 US for eight to ten days. The newly established private camps struggle to offer a higher quality program with professional staff

and to market it to parents at a fee of about \$300 for eight days. The government does not currently regulate or monitor camps but only authorizes the space and food service. Five privately-owned camps have created a Romanian camping organization to attempt to gain recognition from the Minister of Education. For more information on Tabara Mastermind, www.mastermind.ro.

The Rich Tradition of Greek Camping

The concept of camping in Greece began in the early part of the twentieth century with the government-established camps designed to give children a chance to be in a healthy environment and with proper nutrition. These camps featured open air tents with simple programs, and the success of a camp session was measured in the number of pounds gained by each child. Recovery efforts following World War II led to the further development of camps for children who were suffering from tuberculosis, malnutrition, and the emotional trauma of living in a war-torn country. Many companies and governmental departments developed camps for employees and their families, and approximately forty continue to operate today providing not only outdoor programs for children but a respite for adults. Sixty-five private camps are also able to provide low-cost camp sessions for families of all socio-economic levels with subsidies from their parents' social security insurance. One of the oldest, *Ta Glarakia*, was founded in the 1950s and is still directed by 83-year-old Dora Lykliardopoukou, considered the "first lady of Greek camping."

Of all of the countries of the European Union, camping has had the greatest impact in Greece. In a country of less than ten million people, over 100,000 children, ages six to fourteen, attend camp each year. Camp administrators face two major challenges — competition for children to fill their camps and acquiring sufficient land. Greece is a small country and land prices are high. Camps are usually on small parcels of land but have access to the scenic seashores and mountainous areas.

Delphi Camp in Coastal Greece

Not far from the ancient theater and stadium of Delphi, Delphi Camp is located on an isolated bay of the Corinthian gulf. Founded in 1993 by Fotini (Fifi) Sideris, Delphi Camp hosts children from all over Europe, entertaining



them with traditional activities of swimming in the pool or at the beach, sports, canoeing, arts, and dance while immersing them in classical Greek culture through dramatic presentations and excursions to the ancient ruins of the area. Fifi and her two daughters attended the ACA National Conference in San Francisco and were enthusiastic about their learning experience. They are passionate about Greek camping but have been dismayed at the amount of time they must spend in front of a computer managing what has become a small company, juggling the demands of the government and the parents of their campers — a common concern of directors in all countries. For more information on Delphi Camp, www.delphicamp.gr.

The Impact of the European Union on Youth Programs

On October 29 2004, the Treaty and Final Act established the European Constitution with twenty-five members — forming the largest economy in the world. With the current trend toward globalization, greater communication among European countries is occurring in every area — including youth programs. A September, 2003, meeting of European camp professionals was convened in Burgas, Bulgaria, with representatives of

eight countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine. From this meeting came the formation of the European Camping Association with the objectives of facilitating the exchange of information between camps in Europe — establishing standards in services and programs to enhance the quality of camps and arranging exchanges of campers. The members of this fledgling organization hope to become a force to dialog with local governments to obtain greater support for the camp movement and to inform the public of the value of the camp experience. ■

Photos: Page 52, Barretstown Gang Camp, courtesy of Terry Dignant; page 53, Delphi Camp, courtesy of Fotini Sideris; page 56, Tabara Mastermind, courtesy of Radu Zernoveanu.

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