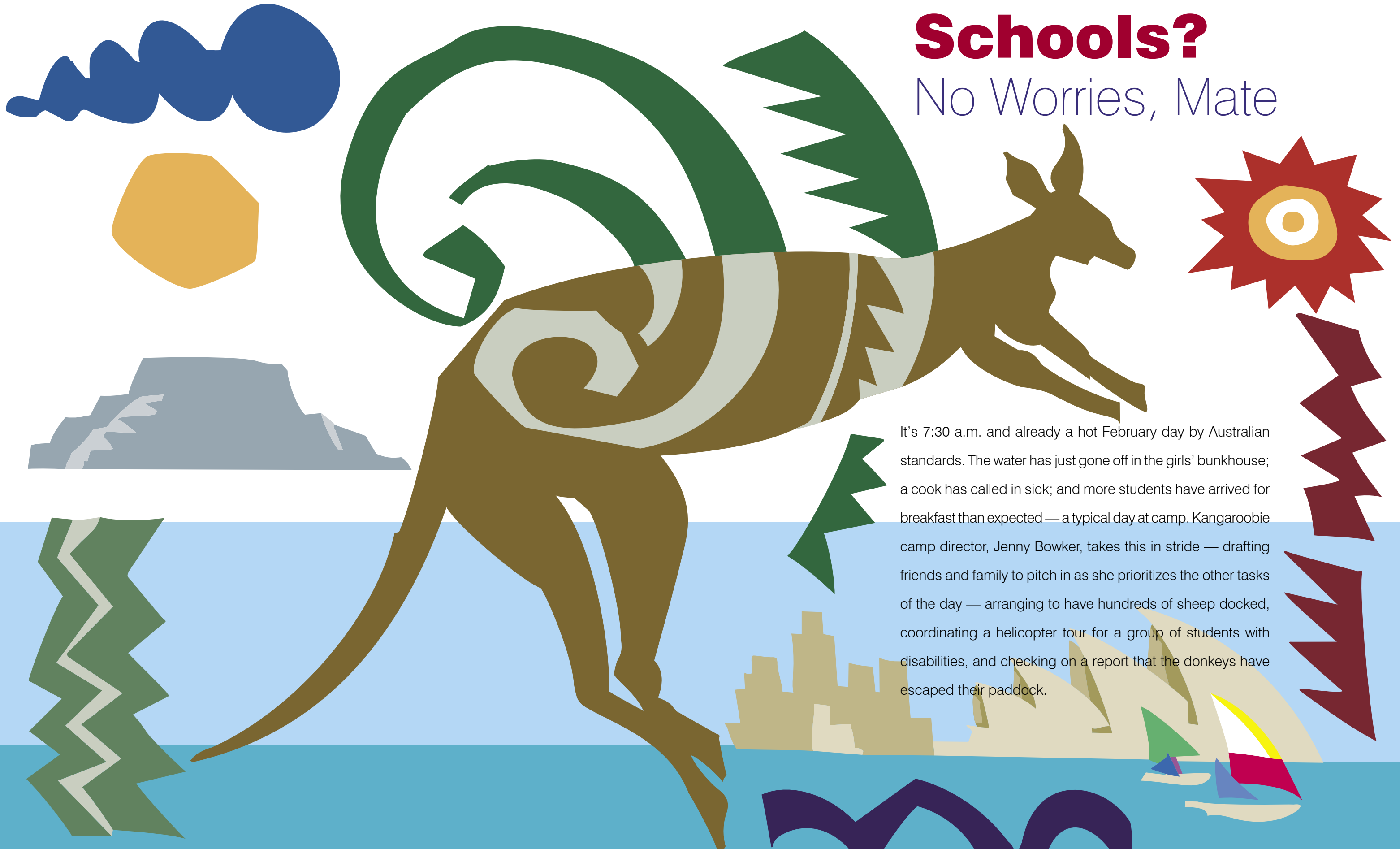


Year-Round Schools?

No Worries, Mate

It's 7:30 a.m. and already a hot February day by Australian standards. The water has just gone off in the girls' bunkhouse; a cook has called in sick; and more students have arrived for breakfast than expected — a typical day at camp. Kangarooie camp director, Jenny Bowker, takes this in stride — drafting friends and family to pitch in as she prioritizes the other tasks of the day — arranging to have hundreds of sheep docked, coordinating a helicopter tour for a group of students with disabilities, and checking on a report that the donkeys have escaped their paddock.



Camping in Oz

Located in Victoria, adjacent to the Twelve Apostles on the Great Ocean Road, Kangarooie encompasses nearly two thousand scenic acres of oceanfront farmland and natural bush. Hundreds of kangaroos may be spotted each evening at dusk on the nearby hills. Wallabies, echidnas, koalas, emu, and deer roam the bush, and a short drive from the camp, millions of glowworms fascinate campers. Owned by the Bowker family since 1858, the farm began providing tourist accommodations in 1979 for ecotourism, school groups, and families. Farming is an attraction for school classes who may participate in sheep shearing, feeding the cattle, pigs, and chickens, bush art, bush cooking, and beach activities. Kangarooie was the first camp in Australia to become fully accessible for persons with disabilities and continues today to provide respite camps and rehabilitation programs.

About 75 kilometers east, near the other end of the Great Ocean Road, Anglesea Recreation Camp attracts schools and organizations with adrenalin-charged programs of surfing, wind surfing, water initiatives, mountain biking, a giant swing, ropes course, and a variety of sports — not to mention the infamous evening “possum prowl.” Located on ten acres adjacent to the town center, a short walk takes campers to the beach to enjoy the Southern Ocean. Anglesea, owned by the State Government of Victoria and leased to a private company, provides more than 24,000 camper nights each year overseen by long-time owner/director, Trevor Mildenhall.

The Origins of Camping Down Under

Ask any Aussie about the origins of camping, and you'll be met with a look of confusion. Families, schools, organizations, churches — everyone camps, very often in tents and close to the beach or in the bush — and being outdoors is the norm in Australia. But ask about “summer camp” where individual children attend for several weeks, and you'll be told that type of camp is rare. The Aborigines and Kooris are known as the earliest campers and even today have a somewhat magical and symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. The tradition of tent camping began in 1907 with Lord Baden Powell's experimental camp on Brownsea Island, followed by the establishment of Scouting for Boys.

YMCA's, churches, and other organizations began to camp after World War I, and some rural schools were organized on farms and later to bring disadvantaged children out of the city for a holiday. Residential camps with permanent facilities emerged after the Second World War as buildings became available, and by the 1970s, school-based camps in dormitories and bunkhouses became popular.

Australia — a huge island where 90 percent of the population lives within one hundred kilometers of the ocean — offers the benefit of temperate coastal areas and an environment conducive to outdoor activities and camping much of the year. The prevalence of camps varies from state to state, as does the ownership and emphasis on school curriculum. In Victoria, about half are privately owned and half under school, church, or organizational ownership. Most Victorian camps have long-standing and strong links to school programs. Other states reportedly have a lower percentage of privately owned facilities and a growing school program.

Camping /s Education

To understand why summer camp does not exist, we need only to look at the Australian school calendar. There is some variation in other states, but the school year in Victoria begins the last week of January and operates four terms, with two-week breaks at Easter, late June-early July, and October. A six-week break beginning in mid-December provides time for families to enjoy the holidays. Most workers are allotted four weeks' leave time each year, and parents usually schedule their holidays to coincide with school vacations. Family Christmas and New Year's celebrations often include trips to the beach, tent camping, and picnics. A few campsites offer a short holiday session, and church groups or youth groups may also schedule a short-term program — but camps are not considered by parents to be a child care option during school holidays. Schools, particularly in Victoria, began to include outdoor education as a part of the curriculum in the 1970s with campsites typically providing housing and other outdoor facilities, and the classroom teachers instructing and supervising their students. In the past decade, however, schools have looked to the camps to provide a higher level of equipment, trained full-time staff to instruct classes, and a more sophisticated meal service. The cost of outdoor education

programs is accepted by parents because camp has become such an integral part of the educational experience.

Typically, schools will take the students of one grade away for three days or a week and provide a variety of activities similar to those of North American camps — swimming, bushwalking, initiative games, challenge courses, or canoeing. The camp will provide staff for many of the activities with teachers taking a supplementary role. For other activities, teachers are briefed and then conduct the activity with equipment provided by the camp.

Camping with Confidence

The evolution of an accreditation program for Australian campsites began following the disastrous Ash Wednesday fires of 1983. Although there were no deaths or injuries to students in the fires, several campsites were threatened. School camping was cancelled for several months while the Department of Education examined safety issues. Subsequently, a disaster management manual was published that addressed fires as well as other potential hazards. At about the same time, other service industries began to address accreditation, and there were examples of government-imposed standards.

The newly organized Camping Association of Victoria (CAV) began in 1984 to examine in earnest what facilities might be accredited and how such a program could be implemented. Victoria's disaster management manual and the American Camp Association accreditation model were studied. In addition to the Ash Wednesday fires, other well-publicized incidents outside camping — such as hostel fires, drownings, flying fox injuries, injuries or fatalities while bushwalking, caving, and abseiling — were driving the CAV and state authorities to propose stronger regulations. After numerous drafts, a document was launched in 1988 that dealt primarily with facility management and health and safety issues, but at that time evaluation of activity conduct was not considered. The premise was that a quality experience could be offered in clean basic facilities, as effectively as in more plush surroundings.

Although some camps were accredited based on this first scheme, it was not until 1992 that the CAV began to work with the Emergency Management Unit of the Department of Education to develop and publish the 1997 version, *Camping With Confidence*,



Camping Association and the Colombian Camping Association, are preparing to offer their own brand of hospitality, highlighted by a fiesta, a performance of the National Folkloric Ballet, camp tours, a volcano hike, and a luncheon at a 15th century hacienda. Most importantly, each International Congress provides a unique opportunity to share experiences and ideas with camp professionals from six continents.

Genaro Ortiz-Tirado, chair of the 7th International Camping Congress, cordially invites all camp professionals, their friends, and families to the Hotel Sheraton Historico, Valle de Bravo, and Xochitla. Full 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.

which lifted accreditation to a new level. While the components of facility management were retained, professional judgments about building, electrical, gas, and emergency plans were passed to building inspectors, fire inspectors, master electricians, and other professionals. Because activities and program equipment had become integral to the school camp experience, they were included in the new scope of accreditation.

Shortly after the publication of *Camping with Confidence*, the State Department of Education issued a mandate that department schools were required to use only accredited sites. In addition, the major insurance underwriter in the state offered a 10 percent discount on public liability insurance to accredited campsites. Endorsement of the program by the Tourism Accreditation Board of Victoria led to wider recognition.

South Australia was the only other state which adopted and implemented the program, often referred to as the Australian accreditation program. More recently, camps in other states have voluntarily begun to use the program. With varying state resources

From Koalas to Sombreros

*The 7th International Camping Congress
October 12-16, 2005, Mexico City*

At the closing session of the Sixth International Camping Congress in Melbourne and Bendigo in January 2003, four hundred camp professionals watched as the International Camping Fellowship glass butterfly was symbolically passed from Australia to Mexico. After five days of experiencing the best in Australian hospitality — cricket, bushwalks, lamb chops on the barbie, diggeridoos, boomerangs, the scent of eucalyptus — the Congress attendees promised to meet again in Mexico City in October, 2005.

Members of the Asociacion Mexicana de Campamentos, assisted by the Venezuelan

and different commitments, a nationally accepted program will come slowly, but there is evidence that the momentum is growing.

Camping for All

Since the early 1980s, Australian camps have been dedicated to providing outdoor opportunities for all populations. As a part of the accreditation program, camps must complete an intensive *accessibility checklist*. Camps then indicate the degree of accessibility of housing and activity areas in the accredited campsite directory, which is used by teachers and the public to contract for camp experiences. While there are few camps specifically for the disabled, nearly all camps stress inclusion, and there are many examples of creative programs such as sibling camps designed for children with developmental disabilities.

Unification of the Australian Camping Association

Although in existence for several decades, the Australian Camping Association has served as a national body made up of representatives

from each state. The Camping Association of Victoria (CAV), with a greater concentration of camps, has remained as the strongest of the state associations. Along with South Australia and Queensland, CAV is now providing the impetus for a plan for unification of the Australian Association with states represented as chapters. Accredited camps would benefit from participation in the national listing, which is a primary source for organizations and educators who schedule group camping trips. Sharing of resources, educational programs, publications, and representation with the federal government all have potential value, and the movement is nearing completion.

A Down Under Mentality?

The only facets of Australia that might be considered upside down are the reversed seasons, the left side traffic, and the direction of the water in a flushing toilet. In some areas of camp administration, Australia may be decades ahead of the United States. As American directors ponder the impact of year-round schools, Australians may wonder when we will realize that camping and education can not only co-exist but can combine the best of both to provide outdoor education to all children. Camp professionals in both countries share similar challenges — legal liability, insurance, financial viability, and increased governmental regulation. But the Australian approach of collaboration with educators appears to offer a solution to at least one of the challenges our American directors face in increasing the use of camp facilities to provide year-round income. ■

Photo in sidebar: Genaro Ortiz-Tirado, chair of the 2005 International Camping Congress.

Linda Grier Pulliam is executive of the American Camp Association, Virginias, and was a camp director for twenty-seven years. She holds an M.S. degree in education, has served on the Steering Committee of the International Camping Fellowship for the past ten years, and is the International Coordinator for ACA.

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