



## CONCERNING CAMP CHRYSALIS

Since this discussion is adapted from our insurance application, it focuses on the dangers of camping rather than the joys. It covers our staff and campers, transportation, site activities and instruction, emergency preparations, screening, releases and water-related activities. A final section includes discussion about water bottles, Lyme Disease, Hanta Virus, and West Nile Virus.

### **Staff and Campers**

We limit session enrollment to a size that enables us to consider each child individually at our nightly, post-bedtime conferences; and to a camper/staff ratio of 4:1, permitting full and continuous supervision. Our staff includes a founding director, who has worked with campers since founding the camp in 1983, three other experienced teachers, college students who have grown up with the camp, and several younger junior staff and counselors-in-training. The founder, a parent himself, is a classroom teacher and prior middle school director with thirty-nine years of classroom experience. He has led school-year camping trips since 1978. Most staff have extensive wilderness and camping experience, NOLS Wilderness First-Aid Certification, and are particularly knowledgeable about the environments in which Camp Chrysalis holds its sessions.

Our campers range in age from 8 to 17 years depending upon the session. Since a principal purpose of the camp is to provide introductory experience, we do not require them to have had prior camping experience. Many campers return in later sessions, so over half are often returning veterans. This helps the camp maintain a rich, stable and unique culture of its own.

### **Transportation**

Transportation to and from camp is in chartered School buses, save for the backpacking session. We use our own vehicles for side-trips during the main sessions, and to bring campers to the trailhead in the backpacking session. All vehicles are in good mechanical condition and equipped with seatbelts for all passengers. A certified mechanic inspects each vehicle shortly before camp begins to ensure that they are in a safe and roadworthy condition. All vehicles and drivers are fully insured.

### **Site Activities**

Our brochure describes the sites and general activities, and activities planned specifically for each session. The sites are all in well-used public campgrounds, presenting no unusual hazards; and are visited regularly by park rangers, who keep us informed about local conditions. The camp involves the children in a wide range of activities appropriate to their ages and the environment. The discussion below concerns only those activities that might involve physical danger. In assessing them, it's important to note that our campers are young, averaging 12.5 years old, and that Camp Chrysalis bears no relation to Outward Bound or wilderness survival

programs. Our focus is on providing a gentle introduction to cooperative camping experience, especially for the younger and uninitiated campers, with modest extension in the backpacking sessions, and on helping campers to learn about the natural science and ecology of each session's environment.

We take several hikes in each session, most from two to five miles in length, at a leisurely pace. All hikes are paced to enable younger campers to enjoy them, though we sometimes divide informally into different paced groups. All hikes proceed along well-traveled main trails through state and national forests; none involve rock-climbing or dangerous passages.

Each session involves campers in activities in or near water, in protected circumstances. No child is permitted to swim or to wade beyond waist-depth without signed permission from a parent and our own judgement of their competence. While swimming, children do so in pairs, in the "buddy" system, with periodic check-calls by the staff — the standard system for managing small-group swimming safely. Many of our staff are strong swimmers with knowledge of standard lifesaving (rescue and resuscitation) techniques; most have many years' experience in supervising swimming in the camp's circumstances. Swimming is permitted only under our direct supervision. No formal instruction is offered, though we assist some campers informally in individual learning. We swim only in placid inland waters, mainly in creeks, shallow rivers, and mountain ponds and lakes, without entangling vegetation or dangerous debris. Other information about water-related activities appears below.

The only other planned activity to pose potential physical danger is archery (in the Sierra session only.) Our focus here is on introductory instruction in basic technique and safety habits. Campers are permitted to practice only in scheduled periods in well-isolated sites, with suitable targets under staff supervision. Our instructor is certified to teach beginning archery.

We encourage campers to bring pocketknives and hand-axes to camp, since camp is precisely the place where such tools are appropriate to use. We focus on learning to use and care for them responsibly and safely. We hold teaching meetings for campers who have brought such tools, and teach sharpening to those who are interested. Use of these tools is permitted only for constructive purposes after appropriate instruction and examination in designated areas under staff supervision.

## **Emergency and Medical Preparations**

We travel and camp with an extensive medical kit, which covers first-aid treatment for ailments and accidents to be anticipated reasonably in the camp's operation. Most staff members have been NOLS trained in Wilderness first-aid and CPR techniques. The camp's activities are well supervised and orderly and not conducive to accident.

The sites of two sessions are in well-tended public campgrounds, with park rangers' offices within walking distance; the third is based in a former Boy Scout camp, with Forest Service rangers available by call. At each site, besides fulfilling permit requirements we register our camp's presence with the rangers and maintain close contact with them. We are familiar with the emergency medical facilities nearest to each site, which lie within thirty to fifty-minutes drive

depending on the session, and have contingency plans to adjust activities and responsibilities when necessary.

### **Screening, Releases, Etc.**

We request all pertinent information about the campers' medical conditions, physical abilities, and needs. (We are already familiar with many campers, from our schools and/or previous sessions.) Per parents' request and with their signed permission, we supervise the administration of medicines prescribed for individual campers. Beyond this, we request and keep on file permissions for us to administer first aid appropriate for immediate treatment of accidents or significant distress as stated in our Health Treatment Protocols. We bring children to medical personnel and additional treatment when this is appropriate, guided by as much immediate consultation with parents as is possible in the particular situation.

### **Water Related Activities:**

During the Mendocino session, water contact occurs at the edge of our local beach where campers are permitted to wade under adult supervision. We spend two mornings investigating nearby tidepools, in areas completely protected from major wave action by outlying rock barriers. We also take a seven-mile canoe trip up the Big River, on a well-traveled stretch without so much as a shallow rapid. Having conducted these trips since 1985, we are quite familiar with the tidal river and its dynamics. All campers wear life jackets while canoeing. We do allow campers who have passed our swim test to swim under staff supervision at our favorite lunch spot up the Big River. At that location, we check the river for possible obstructions and invite campers to take advantage of a rope swing. We also allow wading in the Big River or Noyo Creek where we go on hot days to play games in the sand and at Ten Mile River Beach where, after an exploration of the sand dunes, we spend a few hours building sand castles, playing Ultimate Frisbee and making bull kelp musical instruments.

During the Big Sur session, swimming occurs in the Big Sur River, a shallow stream with pools rarely deeper than four feet, and in the lagoon at Andrew Morales Beach. During the Sierra sessions, swimming occurs in a shallow pond one mile from base camp; in nearby creek-pools; and in the small lakes we visit while hiking and backpacking. In our backpacking session, swimming occurs in mountain lakes and rivers that we encounter along the trail. In all sessions, swimmers are paired in the buddy system, and continually supervised by one or more staff.

### **Sweat Lodge:**

At our Sierra session, we constructed a small sweat lodge out of willow branches that we insulate and cover with tarps to shut out the light and hold in the heat. We sit in a circle in the lodge, steam rising off rocks that were heated outside in a wood fire. The heat and moisture are relaxing and cleansing. One to two experienced staff members are the facilitators for six to eight campers of the same gender. The safety rules and the nature of our ceremony are made clear before we enter the lodge and participants can leave the lodge at anytime. We make sure that everyone drinks plenty of water before, during and after the ceremony. It feels amazing to jump

in the creek after the heat of the lodge. In twenty years, we have conducted sweat lodges for hundreds of our campers. For each group, it is an important part of our building of community full of songs, stories, laughter and heartfelt sentiments. We honor the brotherhood or sisterhood of the group and celebrate friendship and the passage from child to young adult. For many campers, it is a high point of the session and an experience that they remember for a long time.

## **About Water Bottles, Lyme Disease, Hanta Virus, and West Nile Virus**

### **Water Bottles**

Though hard-plastic (Nalgene style) water bottles were standard a few years ago, research suggested that they posed significant developmental risks, affecting children's reproductive systems. The evidence was strong enough for us to advise against using them. The newer hard-plastic water bottles have addressed some of these potential dangers and are considered safe to use by many. Another excellent choice now is the old-style metal canteens, or the new (expensive) stainless steel water bottles. The thin-plastic bottles of store-bought water also seem safe; they are sturdy and light, and can be refilled many times. All water bottles should be filled immediately before trips and not left with standing water.

### **Lyme Disease**

Lyme disease became a concern in the 1990's, since potential complications are delayed and serious, and no region in Northern California can be considered absolutely safe. One early symptom is distinctive — a wide, ring-shaped rash, appearing one to three weeks after infection. Unfortunately, this signature rash appears only 70% of the time. However, outside of heavily infested areas, the current rates of human infection are so low that the risk is insignificant compared to the normal (low) risks of camping and travel. Prudent parents will assist their children with protective measures; monitor any tick-bites closely; and remind their pediatricians about children's woodland experiences if joint or nervous disorders persist. Though we don't camp in heavily infested areas, our attitude is cautious. We minimize potential tick contact by hiking on open trails rather than cross-country. We emphasize protective clothing, although realistically most of our hiking occurs on hot, sunny days with hikers wearing shorts and t-shirts. Therefore after hikes, we have the children check their clothing and their bodies if ticks have been noticed. The incidence of ticks has been so low that we do not routinely spray hikers' clothing with tick repellent. But we'll assist any camper in doing so, if his or her parents prefer. We report any contact with ticks to campers' parents after camp ends.

### **Hanta Virus**

Hanta virus infection can be fatal; the virus is carried by deer-mice; deer-mice live almost everywhere. After dramatic publicity magnified the (very small) New Mexico epidemic in the early 1990s, these facts fueled yet another alarmism about the wilderness. Some putative authorities warned campers to sleep only in closed tents at least thirty feet from any mouse-holes or mouse-droppings -- as if one could, without going nuts about it! Here again, we advise both skepticism and prudence. Parents should be aware that the circumstances of infection are almost

always highly specific, involving massive contact with deer-mouse debris -- e.g., in cleaning their nests from abandoned shacks. We avoid such opportunities, and no longer poke into old wood-rat nests, which might also have harbored mice; but otherwise take no new precautions, nor live in fear. Staff who do an annual cleaning of our Sierra shack wear protective masks and gloves. Though its recognition is new, the virus and the mice have been widely distributed since time immemorial; and no pattern of mysterious deaths from camping activities in California has been reported. Until sober epidemiological reports advise us differently, we will worry more about sprained ankles.

### **West Nile Virus**

This is the most recent exotic zoonosis [animal-transmitted disease] that serves to make people even more afraid of the outdoors. Though its spread is causing significant concern in some distant states, parents here should be aware that of some 10,000 cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control in 2003, only three were from California; and that although the statewide incidence increased in 2004, very few cases were reported from the counties we camp in. Moreover, the symptoms are almost always so vague and non-specific (aches, fever, etc.) and transient, and so seldom leading to serious distress for healthy, non-elderly people, that there's just no point in worrying about them here. Until we hear of solid evidence of significant incidence here, we'll keep following our usual protocols for helping children to avoid mosquito bites. We do use DEET-containing repellants, but we teach campers to use these conservatively. Excessive use of these toxic substances is likely to cause more health damage than the mosquitoes hereabouts do.

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