



CONCERNING CAMP CHRYSALIS

Staff and Campers

We limit session enrollment to about 44 campers, four small groups of about 11 campers and 2 or 3 staff each (though most sessions have fewer campers than this limit). This is 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 1982, other experienced educators, college students who have grown up with the camp, and several younger junior staff and counselors-in-training. The founder, a parent himself, was a classroom teacher and prior middle school director with forty-five years of classroom experience. 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 9 to 17 years depending upon the session. Since one purpose of the camp is to provide an introductory outdoor experience to children, 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 to trailheads during the main sessions, and to bring campers to the location of the backpacking session. All vehicles are tested before camp to ensure that they are in good mechanical condition. They are of course 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 13 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. The exception is one hike in our sierra session which is more about orienteering. Much of this hike is not on trails. Still, no hikes 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. We have a certified lifeguard on staff, and many of our other staff are strong swimmers with knowledge of standard lifesaving techniques. Most have many years of 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.

We encourage campers to bring pocket knives and hatchets to camp, since camp is precisely the place where such tools are appropriate to use. We do not allow sheath knives that have blades that cannot be closed. 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. Campers are required to wear closed toed shoes while using a hatchet and are instructed in safe and effective techniques. We have a supply of knives and hatchets that campers may use at camp. For those campers who are interested in purchasing a knife to use, we recommend one with a locking blade. Please contact Lee, if you want specific recommendations.

Two other planned activities include making a fire with flint and steel and archery (in the Sierra session only). Campers are taught to make a fire using flint and steel in small groups and wear goggles or glasses to protect their eyes while practicing. Our focus in archery is on introductory instruction in basic technique and safety habits. Campers are permitted to practice at scheduled times in well-isolated sites, with suitable targets under staff supervision. Several staff are experienced and can teach beginning archery.

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 sites of two sessions are in well-tended public campgrounds, with park rangers' offices within walking distance; the third is based in a former 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 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. Even if we are already familiar with your child from previous sessions it is important to fill forms as accurately as possible) 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 up to their knees under adult supervision. We spend one morning investigating nearby tidepools, in areas completely protected from major wave action by outlying rock barriers. We also take a seven-mile river 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 in the boats. 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 use 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 many 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.

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.

For any clarifying questions about this document please contact Lee, the camp director, at lee@campchrysalis.com.

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