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**“Learning Our Motto, Living Our Creed”: The Goals  
of Camping in Girl Scout Programs, 1920-1960**

Since the inception of the Girl Scout movement in the United States in 1912, camping and outdoor activities have been staples in programming for leaders and for Scouts. Books for adults and girls involved in Scouting present a camping trip as the culmination of a year’s work as well as experience in both cooperative and personal responsibility. Preparation for such activities began in Brownie Girl Scouting with holding simple play and snacks outdoors. Older scouts later participated in longer outings such as “Brownie Holidays” and camping and hiking

excursions that lasted from one night to two weeks. Included in the preparations were day hikes for teaching and practice of outdoor skills, mostly stemming from merit badge work and the attainment of ranks. Girl Scouts study personal health, well being, and adapted domestic skills to ensure good health and nutrition on trips, and goals of camping trips always related to some real-life skill. Camping and Scouting went hand and hand, especially for Intermediate (Junior) and Senior Girl Scouts, for whom camping was considered most vital to programming. Even with the advent of new technologies, many aspects of outdoor recreation in the Scouting movement have not changed in nearly nine decades. This paper explores the goals and expected outcomes of camping in Girl Scout programs as well as preparation for trips and campouts. In particular, this study examines gender and age in family life as factors in programming, through a comparative study of manuals and other resources from 1920 to 1960. How did the outdoor curriculum benefit the Girl Scout in her life in society and later as a wife, mother and American woman'?

Historical research on the development of camping programs has been minimal, but a wealth of information is available in the form of national handbooks for girls, various leaders' guides and program manuals. Consideration of camping in Scouting existed from the founding of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides in Great Britain, and was passed on to the United States Girl Scouts through Juliette Gordon Low, a personal friend of Lord Robert Baden-Powell and Lady Olave Baden-Powell. This is reflected in the availability of books specifically for camp directors. Because of the national nature of the organization, the goals and expectations for such programming apply to all girls in Girl Scouting, whether from an urban area or a rural setting. In the early days of the Scouting movement, camping was considered a unique program to Scouting in the realm of exercise and physical education, since most athletic activities took place in the schools. The Girl Scout program supplemented, rather than paralleled, the school curriculum. Camping is also universal throughout the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), with similar goals and expected outcomes.

This study places Girl Scouts in context with other youth organizations like Camp Fire Girls and Blue Birds, Bee-Hive Girls of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and Boy Scouts.

Each of these organizations follows a model of programming similar to the Girl Scouts. The paper also places the Girl Scout camping program in a local context. Yearbook and newspaper articles from Western State Normal School, now Western Michigan University, show the presence of a troop of Senior Girl Scouts active in the life of the school and the community as well as in the outdoors in the early 1920s. Local council records and public library archives contain information about Camp Merrie Woode, a Girl Scout camp still in operation near Plainwell, Michigan. The archival information contains much in the way of program goals and accomplishments of troops in outdoor pursuits during this time period.

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