

Campfire Magic

Jim Sharp and John Spencer

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It is very likely that a boy's-or an adult's-fondest memories of his Scouting experiences are of the times he sat around an evening's campfire with some of his best buddies. Those campfires had a magical quality to them-a quality that often defies description. One would be hard pressed to come up with a better way to end a day in camp, or an evening's activity, than with a campfire. But leaders with the skill and confidence to make good campfires happen often seem few and far between.

Perhaps you are one of those leaders who find it difficult to even think about involving your boys in a campfire, let alone set out to plan one by yourself. It is our hope that the following will help and that you will use the information, ideas and methods we set out, to help develop your skills in planning and leading campfires.

In our review of the resources available to Scouters it quickly became apparent that we have a considerable wealth of information on how to lay fires, how to light them with special effects, how to make campfire robes and torches, etc. What we found most lacking is information on how to plan and provide the leadership for a good campfire program. That's what we have set out to provide you with in this article.

A close relationship exists between the physical arrangements for a campfire and the actual program. While a beautiful setting, a well-designed and well-laid fire (lighted with a special method) is awe inspiring in itself; the magic soon wanes with a poorly planned and executed program. Take the time to develop a quality program, one that is well planned and with close attention paid to format and content, and it will be difficult to detract from it with less than ideal physical arrangements. No doubt you've seen an experienced campfire leader hold a group "in the palm of his hand" in a school gymnasium or church hall seated around an artificial campfire! The reason a good campfire leader is able to do it is program. He has paid particular attention to designing a campfire program that will involve and hold the interest of all the participants.

Why A Campfire?

Perhaps B. -P.'s original idea of a campfire was simply a group of Scouts meeting together in camp at the end of a busy day discussing their achievements during that day and making plans for the following day. Campfires can still serve that very useful purpose and they can do much more. Music can express a mood, release emotion or bring a group closer together. Acting (often in the form of campfire skits) serves a very useful part in a boy's development through which he can learn attitudes and appreciations and through which social and emotional developments are stimulated. Value is not limited to participants. While an audience gains satisfaction by identification with the performers, an enthusiastic audience may so stimulate the players that their performance reaches a high standard.

Whether it be song, acting, or other activity, what is most important is not the quality, it is not the enjoyment of those who hear it or see it. Rather, the real virtue is the effort a boy or group of boys have made-the self-consciousness which has been overcome and the sense of achievement when he (or they) sit down to a rousing yell from the rest of the participants.

A campfire is more than just a gathering of people around a fire. Rather than being just an isolated event, a campfire becomes an integral part of Scouting in helping boys develop into the men we want them to become.

A Singsong Or A Campfire?

All too often we tend to feel that we can't just sit around a warming fire and have a singsong. Somehow we have a feeling inside us that someone, somewhere, is expecting us to have a campfire. There is an important difference between a campfire and a singsong and it is important to realize that either may be appropriate.

Singsongs can happen whereas campfires must be planned. Don't deprive your boys (or yourself!) of the enjoyment a singsong can provide. Let them happen, perhaps, at first, with a little urging by you. But once you have introduced your boys to the joy of song you'll find that singing will become a natural expression of happiness and well being. And they will happen—on the trail, in a bus or perhaps as a part of some of your regular meetings.

Campfires are usually seen as more formal events than singsongs. A campfire requires a considerable amount of advanced planning and can be specifically designed to provide opportunities for further development of boys (or adults) through song leading, acting, etc.

Our experience has shown that there are, perhaps, two rather distinct types of campfires. We've classified them as formal and informal. An informal campfire usually takes place with a bit less planning and a bit less pomp and ceremony than what we have classified as a formal campfire.

The most popular type of campfire is the informal one and this is the one which boys are most often exposed to. There may be some campfire robes; there might be a special technique for lighting the fire; there may be some other special effects such as torches lighting the path to the campfire area, etc. But, just as likely, almost everyone will be gathered around a hastily built campfire with nothing more than the bare necessities in the way of seating and special effects.

The formal campfire has a real flavor of Scouting to it with everyone displaying their prized campfire robes; the campfire circle has been thought out and is very neat; the fire has been laid with care and is lighted as though a thunderbolt has struck it; the pathway to the campfire circle has been cleverly illuminated to guide participants and specially designed torches have been placed at strategic locations surrounding the campfire circle to provide the necessary illumination for skits and stunts; the campfire chief enters the circle and receives an enthusiastic greeting; a well planned program involving most of the participants is executed with skill. The fire burns low and the campfire concludes with an appropriate "Scouters Five Minutes", one or two well-chosen spirituals or quiet songs, a prayer and "Taps". Quietly the campfire chief leaves the circle, followed by the participants, all of who are in a thoughtful and peaceful mood. A suitable conclusion to another fine Scouting day.

It is important to realize that the informal campfire and the formal campfire each have their place in Scouting. All too often, though, we find that the only people exposed to the formal campfire are Scouters. Youth and adult alike have a common need for pomp and ceremony and it is important that we recognize this need and provide the opportunity for it to be met. By providing the opportunities for your boys to participate in a formal campfire you'll be providing them with some of those memories that will remain in their hearts for many years to come.

The Fire

One very good resource for ideas in building various types of fires suitable for your campfire is the Scout Leaders' Handbook. It is important to remember that the fire will serve as the focal point for your campfire and particular care must be paid to the planning and laying of the fire. It just isn't suitable to pile a great assortment of brush in the center of your campfire circle and hope that it will light when you throw a match into it!

The fire should be designed to provide warmth to the participants, but it is equally important to ensure that the intensity of the heat will not develop to a point where participants are forced to vacate their spot on the log to retreat to a more safe distance. Through careful attention to design and through experience you'll soon learn to size your fire appropriately so that it will provide just the amount of warmth you require.

Pay particular attention to the type of wood you use in laying the fire. While you may often find that you have little choice in the matter, try to find dry hardwoods to minimize smoke and sparking.

Special techniques for lighting your campfire can add a real sense of drama that helps to build that magical quality we are seeking. The Scout Leaders' Handbook offers a number of workable suggestions and other ideas have appeared in The Leader (see December, 1979 issue). Whatever means you choose to light your fire, take the time to try it out several times in advance of the "big moment" to ensure that it is going to work well. In the event that your method fails in spite of your calculated preparations, be ready with several matches in your pocket! Don't direct particular attention to the fact that it failed, for few will have known of your plans if you've done your planning well.

Appoint a particular person to be the "fire tender" for the duration of the campfire. It will be his duty to ensure that the fire is properly laid (well in advance, of course) and to tend the fire during the campfire program. He will need to be on his toes and ready to take prompt action if a log rolls from the fire, if the flames leap too high and begin to threaten nearby trees (!) or if a small amount of additional wood need be added to the fire if it burns more quickly than you had planned. Make certain that adequate fire protection equipment is readily at hand whenever you plan a campfire.

Your fire should burn in close relationship to your program-strive for a fire that springs to life with bright flames and burns down at about the same rate as you move towards the close of your program. As everyone joins in the singing of "Taps" and the campfire chief intones the inspiring words of the closing, the fire should be little more than a bed of glowing embers.

The Campfire Chief

The campfire chief is responsible for the campfire program. It is important that he (or she) be ready with a well-planned program. He will normally arrange with others to be involved in leading various parts of the program (a job which must be done well in advance to give everyone sufficient time to plan his contribution). The campfire chief is responsible for the campfire opening and closing and often is involved in the "Scouter's Five Minutes". If he does his job well he'll find that he often serves as the "co-coordinator" and involves as many others as is feasible.

The campfire chief should always be held in respect by the campfire participants (regardless of the participants' ages). Normally, he enters the campfire circle after the participants have entered and are standing. The amount of pomp and ceremony that the campfire chief builds into the program is strictly a matter of personal choice. However, he should be greeted with an enthusiastic and respectful cheer such as the popular "Hail, Chief!" as he takes his place.

Anyone can be a campfire chief-all it takes is a bit of imagination, good planning and confidence. Everyone tackles the job in a different way and, perhaps, that is what makes a campfire chief seem a bit of a mystical person. Don't fall into the trap of feeling that you have to imitate to do a good job-your individuality is the most important aspect to consider.

The Setting

What could be more ideal for a campfire setting than a quiet spot in a bit of a hollow, surrounded by trees or a tranquil campfire circle near the shore of a lake? It is important to consider the location for your campfire circle. Try to make it a special spot, away from the more lived-in areas of your camp. Make it a spot people will be drawn to.

If it is a spot that you will be able to use more than once, then you will want to take the time to make it something very special. Again, your imagination and your boys' imagination will help to develop a very special place. Careful attention can be paid to comfortable seating (eight to twelve inch logs raised slightly off the ground will serve admirably for many years) and you may even want to develop special seating arrangements for the campfire chief, special guests and, possibly, other leaders.

An Indoor Campfire?

It isn't necessary to wait for a warm summer evening for a campfire! It is quite possible to have an excellent campfire take place indoors on a cold winter's night with participants seated around an artificial fire constructed with birch logs and various arrangements of colored paper, cellophane, lighting and, maybe, a small fan to give life to the flames. All it takes is a little imagination and ingenuity to provide a suitable atmosphere to complement the campfire program. Take the necessary precautions to ensure that your fire doesn't go up in smoke!

The important element for your indoor campfire will always be the campfire program. Pay particular attention to developing your program and you'll find that everyone will soon forget they don't have the open sky overhead.

Campfire Robes

A campfire robe serves admirably to provide the extra protection required against the cold and dampness of the evening while our hearts and the front of our bodies are warmed by the fire. And, too, it can display our traditions and personal history. A smart campfire robe portraying the wearer's history, his achievements and the events of importance in his Scouting career can be an inspiration to others (boys and adults) to want to work to earn the right to wear a robe that is equally grand. Articles dealing with campfire robe styles have appeared in the October '77 and May '79 issues of The Leader. If you don't have access to back issues, contact your Scout Council office and they may be able to provide you with copies of these articles. Take the time to plan your campfire robe to ensure that it will serve you well for many years.

Duration and Pace

Duration, pace, content and style are some of the considerations which you will have to attend to long before the first song is sung.

The duration of the program is largely determined by the nature and age of the participants. In our experience a campfire program should range in time from a maximum of 20 to 30 minutes for Beavers and Cubs and 40 to 50 minutes being about right for Scouts, Venturers and Rovers. We have found that it is wise never to exceed 50 minutes even when working with a group of adults. The point of having what might appear to be a campfire of short duration is quite simple: if it is going well we leave participants in a very positive mood-longing for more; if it isn't going so well it is wise to conclude it without further prolonging the experience. It is difficult to talk about duration for a campfire program without, at the same time, mentioning the pace, since the two factors combine to give us the framework upon which to place the content. The pace has often been described as a mirror image of the fire itself: rising quickly to a plateau of bright activity and then gradually diminishing, as do the flames, becoming like a glow given off by coals. Below is an outline of a program incorporating this principle of a quick build-up (active) and slowing down toward the closing (reflective).

- Opening
- Welcoming song
- Action song
- Yell
- Skit
- Yell
- Lively or action song
- Round
- Game or skit
- Yell
- General song
- Presentation (if any - followed by yell)
- General song
- Quiet song
- Yarn or "Scouter's Five"
- Quiet song
- Spiritual
- Spiritual
- Prayer
- Closing

The program is sometimes viewed as being a parallel to a day in the life at camp. Either way of looking at the program, as a fire or as a day, is useful in that they both provide us with a guide or a model for us to use in the process of planning the program.

Given that we now have an idea of how long we want the campfire program to be and a particular conception of how we would like to see the pace of the program develop, we can now address ourselves to the question of content.

Program Content

If we are in the business of putting on a campfire in the first place, we might just as well admit that it is a "production" and as such, the content should be managed. As a production, it should have some style and we have found that this is best achieved by using a theme. Not all of the content has to rigidly adhere to the theme but it does help to set and maintain the tone if the opening/closing, yarn (or "Scouter's Five Minutes") and the method used in lighting the fire are tied together. A theme also helps in that it often suggests particular songs and skits that might be appropriate and further help to make the program flow. Think of your program as a piece of music and imagine it flowing in phrases.

The spontaneous part of the program is where the action is-fast, rousing songs, fun action songs that get people moving, simple rounds in which all participate, chants, round games, skits and yells all go into this early half of the program. The specific items will, in part, be determined by the nature and age of the participants and, in part, by the material known to those doing the presentation or leading the group in song. A point to be made at this time is that it is preferable to sing songs that most people know, since it is desirable to have everyone participating. Singing songs known to most, or singing songs that can be "picked up quickly" by the novice, ensure good participation and a feeling on the part of most people that they are involved in the shared campfire experience. Skits, games around the circle, yells and chants should be self-explanatory or described easily in a few words in order to be understood. The concept behind a campfire is one of a shared experience and despite the fact that not all of us can easily act, dance or sing, we must be made to feel that we are a part of the proceedings or the point of the exercise is lost.

We have called the second part of the program reflective which describes the mood we are striving for. This portion can be broken down into three parts: the first being the two songs prior to the yarn, slowing the pace in preparation for the yarn; the second is the yarn, giving the participants a few thoughts to ponder, and is followed by the final part which eases the pace down, reinforcing the spiritual aspects of Scouting. Let's look at the parts one at a time.

We have indicated a transition point in the program outline that is appropriate for presentations. If they are fun presentations they fit in with the tone of the preceding program. If they are of a more serious nature then they will fit in with the tone of the later program. Either way, they should be followed up with our Scouting form of appreciation-the yell. The two songs following the presentations set the scene for the yarn. We are sure that you have all had experiences trying to present a few words to a less than receptive audience. Bringing down the high spirits is essential and the two songs prior to the yarn serve to do the latter well.

The yarn should be a brief presentation giving a focus to the late day activities. Four to five minutes is usually adequate to make your point. In developing your theme and content for your yarn, it is probably best to look at some activity or incident, common to all of the participants, that happened during the day. However, there are many suitable topics, and suggestions often appear in The Leader. B. -P.'s Scouting For Boys has a wealth of ideas. We have seen very effective use made of poems, legends and known stories (such as those about B.-P.) as a yarn. You have a wide selection from which to choose.

The final part of the program consists of a quiet song, spirituals, the prayer and the closing. This part and the yarn should serve to highlight the whole campfire program. The participants should be comfortable with each other and relaxed after a day's activity, and the later part of the program should be supportive of this mood. Most spirituals are well known and leading can often be handled by the shy one in the group without great fear. The closing prayer can take the form of Scout silence or of a more formal benediction. The official closing of the campfire by the campfire chief follows.

After the closing, the campfire chief should make a point of leaving the area decisively to alleviate hesitation about what one should do once the campfire is over. Participants should follow quietly.

Style

Style could be the subject of an article in its own right. However, here are a few points to help bring success to you and your campfire.

- The campfire chief should have everyone aware of those who precede him on the program, to ensure that each person involved knows when it is time for his contribution. This allows introductions and fumbling to be kept to a minimum.

- The campfire chief should also be aware that slip-ups will happen no matter how well the program has been planned. Be prepared to quickly smooth over the ragged edges when required. Quick thinking on your feet is a great asset.
- Flair helps-but, if you don't have it, good execution of your program can be equally beneficial.
- If you must read from a written program do so! Give some creative thought to making your notes a part of the props-for example, inscribe your opening, closing and other program notes on scrolls of paper or birch bark.
- Well-designed torches can be placed to illuminate your notes. But if you don't have a torch and feel you need a flashlight, then use one. It is far better to do so than to be constantly fumbling while trying to have the flames from the fire illuminate your page.

The list of ideas is endless! Perhaps we can best summarize this point by saying that you are in the process of managing a production and it is worthwhile to think out all aspects of the program ahead of time. Consider how you can maximize effects through an awareness of duration, pace and content. Style tends to be something that develops and emerges over a period of time and increasing experience. Some people have it from day one-you can probably easily pick out those people now. But for the rest of us it's a path which we have to travel along, working at developing our style, but the results are worthwhile. You can turn good campfires into great ones!

Good Scouting and good luck!

James E. Sharp is Provincial Field Executive for Interior Region of British Columbia and the Yukon. John Spencer is currently serving as Assistant Regional Commissioner for Interior Region and has been active in Scouting for a considerable number of years.

More Thoughts About Campfires

Reg Roberts

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As promised in the August/September Issue, here is the second in a series of articles about campfires. Again I have used as my resource some material provided by Dave Stephenson of North Vancouver, B.C.

The last article dealt with such things as campfire leadership, instruments at campfires and problems that might arise at a campfire. This time I'd like to look at campfire program content - what we do while we are together.

There's a kind of magic about campfires. It's not evident right away because that's the rowdy fun time but, later, in the fading fire's glow as we sing spirituals and listen to a short yarn, huddling together perhaps for warmth but, most importantly, for human companionship - that's when the magic begins.

Songs

A successful campfire is made of an infinite variety of items - songs, skits, and the happy give and take that signifies this is a pleasurable place to be and a suitable finale to a busy active day or evening.

Of all the material available to us, songs must surely be the most important. Songs break down barriers of reserve and shyness, promote fellowship, generate happy feelings, build morale and bind us together, deepen our loyalty and strengthen our ideals. It seems obvious that it's important to sing the songs in such a way that they express the true spirit of Scouting.

Many "modern" songs have no real place at a Scout campfire, but others fit very well. Every age has songs we should remember, introduce to our campfire programs and pass along to future generations. We may still fondly sing I've Been Working on the Railroad and There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding, but let's not overlook Four Strong Winds and Where Have All the Flowers Gone? Look also at today's music from groups such as Abba, Alabama and the Oak Ridge Boys, and consider as well Bony M's Waters of Babylon, the Coke song I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing and the very popular We Are the World.

Songs are meant to be sung, not shouted and, when properly sung, sound wonderful. The words themselves provide the clue to how to sing a song, but sometimes a very brief explanation of how the song came about or its significance to us can help generate the appropriate sensitivity and expression, particularly with sea shanties and spirituals. Help participants "learn by doing" at the same time as they're having fun.

Try to introduce new songs to a campfire regularly but in small doses. Whenever possible, introduce them at a regular meeting first. Above all, if you are going to lead it, know the song reasonably well before you start.

Types of Songs

Spirituals, those wonderful songs full of rich emotional messages, are usually favorites at a campfire. They all tell stories that reflect faith and beliefs as important to the original singers as our sacred music is to us today.

Sing cheerful, upbeat songs like Daniel, Rock of My Soul, and Michael Row the Boat with vigor and enthusiasm. Jacob's Ladder, Kum by Ah and Swing Low are slower, more thoughtful songs. Try to have the audience enter into the spirit of the music, be it fast or slow, lighthearted or serious.

Everybody enjoys Sea Shanties. Reminders of the old-time sailing ships with their cargoes of tea, cotton, spices and rum, songs like Blow the Man Down, Fire Down Below or What Shall We Do With a Drunken Sailor? almost make us feel the roll of the ship and the salty spray as we sing. Sailors sang many shanties to help them keep time, so you can add hammer striking actions or slow foot stomping for effect.

Many Rounds have an "Olde Englande" background and go back at least to the 17th century. Because they sound so beautiful, they deserve to be sung more often. Rounds are also a way of introducing youthful voices to the idea of harmonizing, which isn't always easy.

Sung well, rounds are beautiful. Sung poorly, they can sound dreadful. It will lead to more success if you have everyone sing the round together a few times before dividing into sections. A natural division for groups is in sixes or patrols and it helps to have a leader for each section. Remember to remind the boys that rounds are not intended as contests to see who can shout the loudest.

Perhaps the best-known round is Row, Row, Row Your Boat with its million versions from Chew, Chew, Chew Your Food to Soap, Soap, Soap and Towel. But don't forget other rounds such as London's Burning, Little Tommy Tinker, Oh How Lovely is the Evening, The Kookaburra Song, Frere Jacques and Three Blind Mice.

Then there are Action Songs. Many songs just naturally lend themselves to some kind of action, whether simple hand movements or dancing around the campfire in a Zulu extravaganza. Actions are a natural and expected part of a campfire program. They are particularly welcome on a cold night but any action, from foot stomping to hand clapping, provides a lot of fun on any night.

Chester Have You Heard About Harry, Ach Von Der Musica, One Finger, One Thumb and Head and Shoulders are all happy, fun action songs. My Bonny, Peter's Fountain, Love Grows Under the Wild Oak Tree and Green Grow the Rushes are a little more thoughtful and serious - good to use as a lead into the quiet part of the evening.

Two Part or Split Songs are those favorites where one half of the group sings one part of the song and the other half sings a different part. Probably the best known is Ging Gang Gooli but Animal Fair and the old chestnut Ham and Eggs are other good examples.

Then there are Mixed Melodies or Combination Songs where one half of the group sings one song and the other half a different song. For example, one half might sing There's a Long, Long Trail while the other half sings Pack Up Your Troubles. How about Three Blind Mice with Are You Sleeping?

For this kind of singing, you really need a leader for each group and some strict timekeeping, but the resulting sound can be truly delightful.

Whenever people come together, you'll hear Nonsense Songs. Whether they are Scouts, Guides, or campers at Camp Opeongo, the words likely have a special meaning to that particular group.

Ach Von Der Musica, When It's Springtime in Alaska, My Tall Silk Hat and Insy, Winsy Spider are just a few of the many daffy songs people love to sing.

Always try to make a place in the program for Folk Songs. They are the songs that tell the history of a country and its people - a way we have of passing on our heritage to future generations. This Land is Your Land is one we know well in Canada, but how many other folk songs are there? The Atlantic Provinces seem to have cornered the market with songs such as Jack was Every Inch a Sailor, The Squid Jigging Grounds and Nova Scotia Farewell. I can also think of Quebec's Alouette, but what do we have from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario or the North West Territories?

Skits, Stunts, Sketches

A campfire without a skit is like a pie without the filling. You can rest assured that, although you may be hard-pressed to get young people to volunteer to present a song, you will be overwhelmed by volunteers if you ask them to present a skit or a stunt.

A humorous skit provides a welcome break, especially since the leaders usually are the butt of the jokes. Most often the skits are just clean fun but, occasionally, a skit can be downright embarrassing and you'll need to come up with some appropriate comment to ease the campfire out of a difficult situation. As I mentioned in my last article, you can generally avoid this type of problem if you set out, in advance, guidelines to what is and what is not acceptable.

Funny skits are always acceptable and so are serious ones. The young actors will usually opt for something funny and that's fine. It's their show and the serious input can come from a leader later on. Scouting's traditions and history, the writings of Baden-Powell and everyday life offer a wealth of material. Costumes can enhance the skit, but sometimes the simpler the better.

Remember to tell performers to keep skits short (about three or four minutes) insist on originality, allow time for adequate preparation and rehearsal, and advise against harmful practical jokes.

Finally, recognize the training value in skits and stunts. A shy boy may blossom behind a set of rope whiskers or a floor mop wig where his shyness flies away to be replaced by a developing self-confidence.

There's still more to campfires and I'll tackle that in a final article in the near future. For now, though, while parts of our country are in winter's icy grip, I hope you're not overlooking the potential of indoor campfires. For those who live where the climate is less severe, a winter evening around a blazing fire under the stars will be a memorable experience. Pass the hot chocolate!

Campfire Magic

Michael Lee Zwiers

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Campfire Magic! You've experienced it. You chose the songs, practiced skits, and organized everything into a program. Then you brought people together and began.

Everything went without a hitch. Participants sang the songs enthusiastically and laughed uproariously (or groaned painfully) at the skits. From there, the tone and pace of the program slowed until the final prayer was just a memory on the lips and in the ears.

As the dying campfire crumbled into ashes, campers reluctantly drifted off to bed. You stood before the glowing embers, soaking in their fading warmth and knowing that everything was just right. You've been touched by campfire magic.

Campfires like this are special but rare. They need not be. With a little careful thought and preparation, they can become the rule and not the exception. What follows are some hints and ideas from Alberta's campfire leader training courses to help you plan a campfire program, deliver it smoothly, and bring the magic to it.

Planning

The structure of a magic campfire is like the shape of the fire. It builds up slowly from the lighting and opening to a peak, and then subsides gradually to the closing as the fire burns down to embers.

The opening includes parading to the formal circle, introductions, the fire lighting, and a short, upbeat opening verse that sets the mood and guidelines for the fire and welcomes people to the magic of the experience. You may deliver it dramatically with arms in the air or holding a hand over the fire. You may involve participants by having them echo a line or, if you are using a "magic start", asking them to concentrate to inspire the fire to light. Perhaps you'll have a number of torch bearers light the fire as you declare it open.

Build up from the opening with some well-known songs, a few rounds, some fun songs, some action songs, a game and stunt or two and, at the peak of excitement, skits and yells. Bring down things slowly with a few rousing songs, some quieter songs, a story or Scouter's Five, a spiritual song or two, vespers and taps, and a closing verse.

You might include a short Scout silence before the verse or invite participants to pause for a moment to listen to night sounds or reflect and be thankful. Many campfire leaders end the verse with "I now declare this campfire closed" but, as Lewis Carroll once said, "They don't seem to have any rules in particular; at least, if there are, nobody attends to them."

Hints For Success

Before the event, review campfire etiquette with your gang. The campfire circle is sacred and always quiet before and after the fire. Prohibit flashlights from the circle. Make a no-talking rule. If wood needs to be added to the fire during the campfire, only the Keeper of the Flame may do it. Applause takes the form of yells, not clapping.

Choose a magic site (on the lakeshore, etc.) and, however you start it, keep the fire a reasonable size. Fires that are too big can take away the magic. To enhance the mystique, you may want to add ashes from your last campfire to this new one. And, if you clean up all the coals and other signs of festivity before the next morning, your campers will always think of the campfire site as a special place.

Keep the program short. If you will offer refreshments later, plan time so that it won't break up a good program. For the greatest success, involve as many people as possible in the campfire as leaders of songs or yells or players in skits or stunts. If you can, audition songs and skits ahead of time to avoid any possible problems, either with difficulty or poor taste.

Choose songs you enjoy and know your young members enjoy. Stick to the familiar rather than trying to teach a new song, unless it is something really easy, repetitive, and fun. Be sure you include parents and special guests as well as campers. Avoid song sheets or books, a sure way to destroy atmosphere as participants turn their backs to the fire in hopes of catching some light to read the words.

Look for audience feedback. Are they singing and taking part or looking bored? Keep it alive. If a song is too slow, speed it up. If it is really dragging, simply end it and move into a "no fail" song you have up your sleeve. Set a brisk pace with minimum breaks between songs.

Sometimes campers become so caught up in the fun they want to sing every song they've ever heard. You have to be firm, but remind them they can have their own sing song and put in all their favorites at their tent site after the formal campfire is over.

If someone brings along a musical instrument, ensure that it enhances the experience. If it begins to detract by becoming a "solo" act because nobody knows the songs or they are all slow ballads, stop the player firmly but politely.

Announce the next act or song at least one act ahead so that the people involved have time to prepare. If you know who is on next, you can simply whisper in an ear to alert them. Keep a set of quickie yells, stunts, or songs on hand in case a person or group is not ready to perform when the time comes or you need to stop a performance for some reason.

For example if, despite your screening, a group begins a skit or stunt in poor taste, stop it. Indicate simply that it is not appropriate and go on with something else. After the campfire, talk with those involved to explain the reason for your actions.

Once you've eliminated the problem of poor taste, skits or stunts can still go wrong if the players speak too quietly or position themselves badly (e.g. with backs to the audience). That's another good reason for pre-campfire auditions. To work well and safely, a skit needs good light. The Keeper of the Flame can add small sticks to a dim fire. You might also provide pot lights or kerosene lanterns, as long as they aren't so bright they detract from the atmosphere.

Keep a firm rein on proceedings to avoid things like poorly timed announcements that can destroy the magic. If some participants begin to cause a distraction, you can do one of two things. Signal another Scouter to tap them on the shoulder and talk quietly to them, or quickly bring into the program a Scouter's Five related to their behavior. If you stop a campfire to lecture noisemakers, it's an automatic downer.

A campfire may be magic, but there's no trick to it, just good planning and some common sense. At the many campfires in your future, may you often be touched by the magic.

Scouter Michael Lee Zwiers, Edmonton, Alta., has six years experience at helping with campfire leader training courses.

MAGIC CAMPFIRE STARTS

Compiled by

Scouter Stewart Bowman

8th Whitby Scout Troop

Whitby District

Lakeridge Region

Ontario, Canada

November 1992

INTRODUCTION

The following compilation of "Magic Campfire Starts" has been collected over a period of years and from a variety of resources. Although new methods have been added to this production, the core of ideas was submitted to The Leader magazine in April 1992 and a modified version appeared in print in the October 1992 issue of that magazine.

The Leader magazine omitted any of the chemical based methods submitted; however the reasons were valid and totally understandable. I have included a full range of magic fire starts in this booklet as I trust that recipients, who intend to practice and refine the art of magic fire starts, will exercise due care and diligence in the attempts to try some or any of the following ideas.

I caution everyone who may wish to try these ideas to be careful. I accept no responsibility for the results of your efforts, whether they be good or bad.

I do however maintain a strong interest in continuing to build and refine the ideas presented here. I would be very interested in hearing from users of this material, your comments on the content and any new ideas that you may have used.

Good Luck, and have fun!

Yours in Scouting,

Scouter Stewart Bowman,

A WORD OF CAUTION

Unless you are very comfortable with the ideas presented here, the results may not always conform to your expectations - remember Murphy's Law!

With a little forethought, care and caution you can maximize the opportunity for success and minimize the chance for failure.

Don't interpret the following as rules, they are merely clarifying the common-sense approach that most of use anyway....

1. These ideas are not games and should not be approached as if they are.
2. I know this is contradictory, but only people in full control of their mental faculties should try these. The contradiction being that you've got to be slightly off balance to be an adult Scouter anyway!
3. Exercise extreme caution when dealing with corrosive, poisonous, inflammatory material
 - o Always mix and use chemicals outdoors,
 - o Follow instructions to the letter. Do not experiment,
 - o Never throw a lighted match into a mixture to ignite it,
 - o Avoid large quantities - more is NOT better.
4. Practice the chosen fire start several times before you actually use it in front of an audience, and always have sufficient supplies on hand for your practice runs.
5. Check reaction times between activation and ignition, as this will help you plan the story that you will use in conjunction with the fire start. Become familiar with the "noises" that may accompany certain of the fire starts.
6. Always have a "Plan B" ready if "Plan A" fails - and it will, sooner or later.

CAMPFIRE ETIQUETTE.

There are a number of other resources covering the structure and contents of a well-planned formal campfire. Repeating these concepts here would be somewhat redundant, but I have taken the liberty of including a copy of an excellent article on campfires that appeared in the June/July '89 issue of The Leader (Appendix III). There is one aspect, however, that I feel does warrant repetition here and that is how we conduct ourselves at the campfire.

There are 3 basic practices which we try to follow at every formal campfire: -

- No flashlights - we have the fire to light our way,
- No Clapping or Booing - that's why we have 'cheers',
- No Talking - unless you're involved in an activity, talking spoils the mood and detracts from whatever is going on.

In campfires I've attended or lead, the later point is sometimes not controlled too well. Scouter, please make sure that your scouts are not the ones disrupting the campfire. Have them show proper respect towards the efforts of the Campfire Leader and participants.

FIRE LAY CONSTRUCTION.

There are a number of different ways to build your fire in preparation for the magic fire start.

Where pre-positioning of the fire-start mechanism is involved, the Council (or Pyramid) fire lay is the preferred style. By building the various layers with dry kindling between the wood pieces, you can easily conceal your fire start material. The natural structure of this style of fire also leaves a 'chamber' in the center that is just what you need to place your fire start mechanism in, so that any material that has to be added to cause ignition can drop on to the mechanism.

Should your fire start involve material being flown in - such as for the 'Flaming Arrow' fire start - then the Teepee style fire lay might be the choice. Where the 'arrow' enters the fire lay, an opening can be left in the fire material that can be well packed with dry kindling and other quick combustibles.

If your personal favorite is the Log Cabin style, this can also be used quite nicely with some of these magic fire start ideas. This particular style is well suited to electrical based fire starts where the ignition mechanism can be placed in the middle of the fire lay and yet still be hidden by kindling.

One item that I strongly discourage from being included in any fire lay - regardless of the weather conditions - is liquid fuel (white gas; naphtha; charcoal starter fuel, etc.) as the results can be somewhat unpredictable if used with some of the ideas presented here. Any Scouter who needs this to get a fire going is probably not suited to trying Magic Fire Start Ideas (see page 3, A Word of Caution, Item #2).

SETTING THE SCENE.

Before everyone gets to the campfire, you can do a lot to prepare the scene and get everyone in the right frame of mind. Three ideas I've seen work very well, but are more appropriate at a District (or higher) camp(oree) where you have a large number of participants involved.

- The first involves gathering everyone together away from the campfire area. This avoids disruption or delays at the fire itself, when groups arrive late. It also gives the Camp Fire Leader an opportunity to go through any last minute instructions. When ready, everyone can then walk quietly in file and form up around the fire site.
- The second idea, coupled with the first, solves the problem of everyone not quite knowing where to stand when they get around the fire. Since we are talking about a formal campfire, reinforce this by pre-determining and marking the circumference of the fire site with suitable markers and establish an 'entrance' to this area through a flag honor guard. The Campfire Leader can then lead everyone through the honor guard and around the boundary line. By the time the leader comes back around to the perimeter to the entrance way, everyone else who followed him will be properly positioned around the fire.
- The last idea is neat and very effective. Although you can mark the perimeter of the campfire circle in a number of ways, my personal favorite has involved placing lighted candles in brown paper bags. To do this you need a supply of small brown bags, then add a couple of handfuls of sand into each bag. The sand not only keeps the bag anchored on the ground, but it also keeps the neck of the bag open and forms a base in which you place a candle.

If you want to get really clever with this idea, a normal household emergency type candle will burn down at an approximate rate of 2 inches per hour. If you've planned a one hour campfire, anchor the candle with about 2 inches left above the level of the sand.

Pre-position the bags around the perimeter of your campfire circle and have a couple of helpers (depending on the number of candles) light the candles as participants are being lead towards the fire area. This looks really neat for those approaching the area.

Hopefully, if things go right, your perimeter candles will keep your audience from goofing around too much (since they can now be seen?), will stop them creeping ever closer to the campfire ('cause they don't want to get too close to the candles?) and will nicely close off the campfire as they all burn down around about the same time - yeh, right! But give it a try anyway.

Should you wish to be a little more creative or formal in the illumination of your campfire circle, there are a number of styles of 'torches' that can be made. As with any matters dealing with open flames, please make sure that safety is uppermost in your thoughts when determining style, placement, proximity to people, etc..

THE USE OF STORIES

Since we frequently arrange camps with a theme, why not evolve your campfire also around a theme which could further impact both your campfire opening comments and the method of lighting.

In any event, magic fire starts deserve to be supported with a story. In determining the story to use remember that it should in some way 'explain' the magic involved; it could get participants active in the fire start itself; and it will enable you to set up particular timing prompts if the fire start needs assistance from others.

Mechanical Fire Starts #2 & #3 include related stories that also explain the fire start, but here are a couple of others that you could adopt & adapt.

Peter the Elf

"While getting the wood ready for the fore tonight, I came across a small wood-elf trapped in the underbrush. Since a Scouter is always kind, considerate and helpful, I helped free him. In return he promised to help me if I ever needed it. All I have to do is call."

"Since this is the first time I've ever met a wood-elf, I've no idea if he will keep his promise to me. Maybe we should see if he will help us to light this fire?"

Shout out - "Peter the Elf, will you light this fire for me?" - no response. Call a second time, still nothing happens.

"Maybe he can't hear my voice. Let's all shout - Peter the Elf, will you light this fire for me?"

Time the fire start so that the fire lay ignites after the last shout.

The Indian Pow-Wow

"Some of you may know that, not very far from here is land considered sacred by the Indians who used to live in this area. No one can remember what this land was used for, but the scholars think it was where the tribe used to get together for special councils and pow-wows. It's funny, but there's no historical evidence to support this and its all based on local legend."

"Some of you may have noticed the old farm near the camp site entrance. Old Charlie lives there and he's become quite an authority on local Indian legends."

"One of the story's he tells is of how the Indians used to signal that there was a pow-wow about to start. Once all the council members were around the circle, they would signal that they were all present by stamping their feet on the ground. Like this...." Get everyone to join in.

"At that signal the Council Chief would send a fire arrow into the air to signal the start of the pow-wow."

These ideas should give you a bit of a start in developing your own story's, and don't be afraid to tailor the fire start to the camp theme. The theme could be space, pioneering, circus, UFO's; whatever. A little creativity will enable you to come up with a really great story to introduce the fire.

MAGIC CAMPFIRE STARTS

Everyone thought that the campfire was great! It was a beautifully clear night, the fire burnt down precisely on schedule; the skits were good; the cheers were new - and appropriate. Everyone knew the words to the songs - and sang in tune (especially the adults!). How can you improve on that? Well, here are a few ideas to add to your repertoire of campfire magic.

Imagine the scene at your next campfire. Everyone has walked into the campfire circle, your opening is inspirational but everyone is wondering why the fire isn't lit yet. You then lead off with a short story to fit the circumstances and then ask for everyone's help in calling on the appropriate spirits to light the ceremonial fire. A short pause, then..... FLASH! The campfire is roaring away and yet no-one was anywhere near the fire to light it!

These magic campfire starts may help you add that touch of mystique to a potentially memorable occasion.

Mechanical Fire Starts

1. Take a 2 x 4 piece of wood, about 3 - 4 inches long. In the middle of this drill one 3/8" hole all the way through. This should be large enough to put a large nail or spike through and secure the wood to the ground. Still with this same piece of wood, drill as many 1/8" diameter holes in it that you can, but not all the way through the wood. A drill guide will help you to get all these holes the same depth. The depth will be determined by the length of the blue tip wood matches that you should then place in these holes, leaving only the match heads slightly above the wood surface.

Take a second piece of 2 x 4 wood and glue some sandpaper to one side. Also secure a small "eye" screw to one end.

Hold the two blocks of wood together with rubber bands (after staking the first piece of wood in the middle of your fire lay), and surround with plenty of dry kindling.

Attach a wire to the "eye" screw and, at the appropriate moment, pull. The friction of the sandpaper against the match heads will cause them to ignite, thereby setting the kindling on fire.

2. The "Flaming Arrow" is a traditional favorite. Drive a stake a little beyond the heart of the fire lay, as it is being laid. From this stake run a length of nylon fishing line up to a nearby high point and tie securely so that the line is very taut. The angle should be sufficient to ensure a smooth and fairly rapid decent of the 'arrow' otherwise you run the risk of the flame burning through the fishing line before the arrow reaches the fire.

The arrow is attached to the line through two spools (so make sure you thread the spools onto the line before you tie it off !) To the head of the arrow secure a bundle of dry flammable material. At the appropriate time during the introductory story, an assistant lights the arrow and releases it to slide down to set the fire alight.

One of the benefits of using fishing line for the line to the fire, is that once the fire is alight the fishing line will burn through and the assistant can then retrieve the line without those attending the campfire being aware of it. If you find that the fishing line does not work for you, use wire instead, but tie the wire to fishing line where it passes through the fire lay. This piece will burn away when the fire is lit, allowing you to retrieve the length of wire.

3. Variations on the above method include tying the flammable material directly around a weighted spool and sending that down the line to create a 'fire-ball' effect.

I've also heard of fireworks sparklers being attached to the arrow to give quite a spectacular impression.

4. One idea included in several Scouter resource books is to have a candle pre-lit in the fire lay, but covered by a #10 Can. The candle is secured to a wooden base with a line attached to it. At the appropriate moment, pull the candle out from the can and the kindling will catch fire.

Electrical Fire Starts

1. When setting up electrical fire starts, the weight of the wire used to generate heat will depend on the size of the battery you intend to use and the distance between the battery and the ignition device. Practice beforehand will enable you to properly rig your fire start, but, as a guide, use fine wire for a 6-volt battery source. If your power source is a 12-volt car battery a heavier wire will be required.

2. Steel Wool and "D" cell batteries are frequently used in survival techniques as an emergency method of starting a fire. Based on this principal, one campfire start idea is to use steel wool in the fire lay (surrounded by small dry kindling) remotely attached to a car battery. The battery could be disguised by hiding in a box that would double as a seat for the Campfire Leader, with a switch on the side of the box to complete the electrical circuit and start off your fire.

3. A variation on the above involves a little more creativity with the electrical connections. From the disguised car battery/campfire seat, you'll need 3 electrical circuits and switches. Switch #1 connects to a yellow taillight secured in the fire and hidden under kindling. Switch #2 is hooked up to a two more light bulbs. Switch #3 hooks up to steel wool, as detailed in the previous method.

As part of your campfire opening, get everyone to assist by blowing towards the fire. As they do so, throw switch #1 and everyone should see a yellow glow coming through the fire. Turn off the switch after a second or two.

Obviously not everyone was helping or blowing hard enough, so get them to blow again. Throw switch #2 and a stronger light will be seen in the fire. Turn the switch off after maybe five seconds.

One last time! Obviously it was the Scouters who weren't trying hard enough. As everyone blows hard for the last time, trigger the third switch to set the fire alight.

Remember to pull the lights attached to Switches #1 & #2 out of the fire lay before you set the fire going, unless you want to compete with exploding light bulbs!

4. Take a block of scrap 2" x 4" with a saw cut through the centerline. Two nails are driven in at either end of the block on opposite sides of the saw cut. These nails will provide 'terminals' to hook up to the power source. Insert an uncovered paper match book into the saw cut, and thread a very fine piece of wire through the match heads, connect the wire to the 'terminals'. Attach the wires from your power source also to the 'terminals' after connecting them through some switching mechanism. When a current is passed through the wire, heat will be generated which will ignite the matches and then set off your campfire kindling.

5. Take a bunch of friction type matches and secure with a rubber band. The bigger the bunch, the more spectacular will be the fire start. Then take a metal spring from a spring-loaded pen and stretch this spring to be slightly larger than the diameter of your bundle of matches. Lay the spring through the matches, so that it is touching the match heads. Place this bundle on kindling in your fire lay.

Remotely attach a battery to the ends of the spring wire, through a switching mechanism. At the correct time, throw the switch and the spring will generate electrical heat that will ignite the matches.

6. This next idea builds on the previous one, but requires a little more creative electrical and carpentry skills. Once you've set it up, however, it could be either your primary fire start method or a back-up method if "Plan A" fails.

Take a piece of deadwood about 5-6 feet in length and at least 1-½ inches in diameter at the base. Carefully drill a hole vertically into the base, of a sufficient depth/breadth to hold your battery power source. Run wires (covered where exposure is not necessary) from the battery up the outside of the staff, with one of the wires going through a simple switch set at about the 4 foot mark. The ends of the wires should be stripped and terminate about 8-10 inches below the top end of the staff. Wrap several layers of dry flammable material around the first 8-10 inches from the top of the staff, secure with wire.

Just below the flammable material, tape an open book of matches and run a fine wire, from the wires attached to the battery/switch, through the match heads.

Hold the staff away from your body - yeh, really this is a good idea! - and trigger the switch to light the match heads that will then catch the flammable material. Your flaming torch can then light the campfire. Since you always keep a bucket of water near your fire, extinguish the torch after use and it'll be able to be used again.

Chemical Fire Starts

1. In the fire lay, place a pre-prepared piece of 2 x 4 wood, with four 6-inch nails driven partially into it. Between the nails, on the wood, place a small aluminum tart cup with at least two tablespoons of Potassium Permanganate (available from most pharmacies) in it. Supported on the heads of the 4 nails place a second aluminum cup that has had three or four small holes punched in the base. Tilt this cup to one side by placing a twig across two of the nails and then balance the cup so it is supported. In this cup place a quantity of Glycerin (also available from Pharmacy's) - but not enough so that it trickles through the holes. The twig should have a length of fishing line tied to it, with the line stretching away from the fire lay.

By pulling on the fishing line and removing the supporting twig, the cup containing Glycerin will drop to rest horizontally and the glycerin will spread out over the cup's base. A couple of drops will then fall through the pre-punched holes and onto the Potassium Permanganate.

After a short pause the glycerin will react with the Potassium Permanganate and create a flame which will need to catch your kindling thereby setting the fire lay ablaze.

2. Take a model rocket igniter (available at most hobby shops) and pass the igniter through the inside of a paper baggy leaving two little wires sticking out. Then carefully remove the contents of a "Colored Flower Bloom" or "Giant Fountain" fireworks (use only one) and place into the paper baggy.

Attach the clips from a model rocket-firing device to the two wires coming out of the baggy. Prepare the mechanism by pulling the safety pin. Then, when you're ready, press the firing button and POOF! Another magic fire start.

The next two ideas are particularly clever, and I'll quote from training material prepared by Bill Glover, DRC (Training), Southern Alberta Region, as he explains them excellently....

3. Crush 1 teaspoon of iodine crystals to a very fine powder, then mix with 2 teaspoons of powdered aluminum. IT IS CRITICAL THAT THIS MIXTURE REMAINS ABSOLUTELY DRY.

Place this mixture in the fire lay on a piece of plywood, forming a volcano shaped mound. When the participants are gathered around the campfire, ask if anyone has a canteen of water in case the fire gets 'out of hand' (you may want to set this up beforehand). Pat your pockets as if looking for a match, but finding none, ask to borrow some water. Sprinkle it on the fire lay (ensure a few drops hit the iodine/aluminum mixture) and you will be greeted by billowing purple smoke,

followed by deep red flames. Someone is bound to ask, "OK. So how do you put it out?" Simply tell them you'll throw matches on it!

Note: The powdered iodine "evaporates" very quickly. As a result this mixture must be used within about 10 minutes of preparation.

4. A teaspoon of Pine sol or Pine Oil is placed in a shallow container within the fire lay. The story that Bill uses to introduce this magic fire start is based on the ashes from a previous campfire. The "Ashes" are a half a cup of HTH Granulated chlorine. When the two are combined, they produce a large quantity of white smoke, followed by flames. This is a relatively slow reaction, so Bill opens the campfire with the following story.

"As we gather here tonight, for our formal campfire, I think back to the closing campfire from last year. It was such a great fire, and the feelings of love and friendship so strong. In order to try and rekindle those feeling for our fire tonight, I would like to add some of the ashes from last years fire. Now, before I light the fire tonight, I would like you all to look at this pile of wood, and think about your own feelings about last year's fire, and what made it special for you."

SPECIAL EFFECTS.

Once your campfire is nicely roaring, it may be appropriate to add 'special effect' flames to enhance a story or just close down the campfire ceremony with a little more magic.

Try adding a spray of chemicals to the fire. The following can either be sprinkled on the logs as you build the fire lay or added to the fire itself to enhance a story or activity. They all create a flare of colored flame than can be really effective if not overdone.

Colored Flames

Yellow

- Potassium nitrate (salt petre)
- Sodium chloride (table salt)

Green

- Borax
- Barium nitrate
- Copper sulphate

Sparkles

Silver

- Powdered aluminum

Gold

Flashes

Red

Equal parts by weight of strontium nitrate and powdered magnesium

Smoke

Equal parts by weight of black gunpowder and powdered magnesium

Purple

- Lithium chloride

Red

- Strontium nitrate

Orange

- Calcium chloride ("Road Salt")

- Iron filings

Green

Equal parts by weight of potassium nitrate, boric acid, powdered magnesium and powdered sulphur

Where the above chemicals or compounds are not readily available from Hardware/Grocery Stores or the local Pharmacy, check the 'Yellow Pages' for a chemical supply company.

In talking to your pharmacist (for example) please ensure that you have developed some sort of level of comfort with the owner before you start asking for a variety of chemicals. Let them know the purpose for the chemicals, and that you are a registered Scouter not some closet pyromaniac!

One method of adding chemicals to a campfire without anyone being aware that it was done is to use a photographer's air bulb release. These use a tiny black air hose attached to a squeeze-bulb trigger. The air hose can be buried so as to remain unseen, and the simple act of stepping on the air bulb (perhaps further hidden under a piece of bark) will blow the spray of chemicals onto the fire.

Another method is to take a six inch long piece of 1" copper pipe and stuff 4" pieces of good quality lawn soaker hose into both ends (don't use the clear type of hose). Placed in the fire you'll have an abundance of colored flames. Using 2 or 3 of these can create a super effect.

A third option is to pre-make "shots" that can be flipped into the fire. A "shot" is made by creating a tightly rolled ball of paper, dipped in wood glue and the roll in a tray of the chosen chemical. The chemical will coat the outside of the ball and react when thrown into the fire. Store these "shots" in an egg carton until needed - one "shot" per egg carton section!

Here's another 'sparkling thought' from the pages of The Leader. You need enough sugar to give everyone a small handful. After closing the campfire, have everyone walk past the fire embers and toss their sugar onto the fire. You can compare the flashing sparks and quick flares to happy thoughts, or simply enjoy these thoughts in silence.

PHYSICAL LOCATION.

If you want to make your campfire even more memorable (is this possible? - you ask) consider the actual location of your campfire. Anyone can light a fire in the middle of an open field - why don't you try something different?

If you're camping by a lake, why not construct a solid raft and have the fire burning on it? Lighting it out of sight of your assembled audience, then allowing it to drift into position behind the campfire leader will create a very special image. Remember to suitably anchor the raft so that it doesn't keep drifting past you!

An alternative may be to have the fire towed in by canoe (two towing with a third canoe to provide a trailing anchor). The canoeist's can bring the fire raft in and beach it on the shore in front of the assembly.

Back on dry land, why not construct your fire lay a couple of feet above the ground on a lashed frame? More tricky yet would be to have the fire lay built on a secure frame and then hoisted (using rope and pulley's) some distance above the ground. Once the fire is lit, using a "magic fire start" idea, the campfire could then be lowered to the ground to create another memorable opening.

When you have a particularly large group of participants at a campfire, instead on one central fire why not consider having three or four fires in the circle? In addition to giving a greater illusion of warmth to participants, a 'stage' is naturally formed between the fires for the campfire leader and any groups doing skits, etc..

CONCLUSION.

As the flames from the fire burn down, and participants slowly walk away in wonderment and appreciation, reflect on your achievement. A campfire can be a memorable occasion for youth and adult alike, but it doesn't happen by accident.

The day was long; we've worked and played. And round this fire, we've good friends made; We've shared a friendship fine and deep, And now this circle leaves, to sleep.

As Campfire Leader you have put a lot of time and effort into planning, setting the scene, and stage-managing the evenings activities. Now it is time for you to walk away from the dying embers, reflect on your success, enjoy a time of friendship and fellowship with the scouts and Scouters.

Sit back, relax, and start to figure out how you're going to lead your next magic campfire so that it's even more memorable than this one!

Good Luck, have fun, and let me know how it goes.
Scouter Stewart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I am particularly indebted to Scouter Bill Glover, DRC (Training), Southern Alberta Region, who not only set me on the trail of collecting these ideas, but he also provided me with a copy of material he had gathered for a training course conducted in Calgary.

A large vote of thanks is also due to the many contributors from the International Scouter Echo (see The Leader - Aug/Sept '92) who provide tangible proof and practical experience of the meaning of Worldwide Brotherhood of Scouting. Not only is there an unparalleled depth of knowledge available for anyone to draw on, but - even though we may never actually meet one another - I consider everyone of them a true friend. In particular, special recognition is due to the following who provided much of the information and a lot of inspiration :

Scouter Dave Tracewell, Lodi, California (& moderator of The Scouter Echo)

Scouter Randy Carnduff, Regina, Saskatchewan.

Scouter Fred Welch, Colorado.

Scouter Brad George, Oklahoma.

Scouter Carl McCaskey, Florida.

Scouter John Meed, Regina, Sask.

Scouter Kihe Blackeagle, Texas.

Last, but certainly not least, the greatest acknowledgement has to go to the youth members we do this for. They come in all shapes & sizes; attitudes & aptitudes; motivated & mischievous; but they make it all worthwhile. Thank you, one and all.

A Tale of Campfire Magic

by MaryAnn Gardner

It's no secret that people sometimes have trouble communicating. If you are having difficulty explaining the "essence" of Scouting to someone, perhaps you should try the method used here, in this tale (which is based on a true story). The moral? "If all else fails, try a campfire."

He Said: Our son should join Scouting.

She said: Tell me what Scouting is.

He said: Well, the Boy Scouts of America says that Scouting offers a "...time-tested set of activities that have produced fine citizens, dedicated family members, and strong community leaders for more than 90 years."

She Said: I want our son to take part, if it's worthwhile. But, I know very little about Scouting. Tell me more.

He said: Scouting teaches positive values. As the BSA says, It has activities that "...build personal fitness, social skills, and leadership." I'm a Scout myself, you know.

She Said: I know I'm supposed to be impressed when told someone is an Eagle Scout. But, no one ever says what that means. I know that cub scouts wear blue shirts - and boy scouts wear tan shirts. What else?

He Said: Scouting's activities are time-tested. Scouting has a big part in producing "...good citizens, caring family members and dedicated community leaders."

She Said: I know adults who are Scout leaders. I'd like to be a Den Leader - if it's fun. You know me, though. I always like to try a new approach. Is the entire program planned step by step, or is there a chance for me to use my creativity? Will our son have a good time? Or, will it be like going to another school with more homework? This is supposed to be recreation, isn't it?

He Said: Scouting provides "...wholesome, educational activities for young people. They go outdoors, have a chance for advancement, the opportunity to be recognized for their achievements, and belong to an organization that promotes good values. "

She Said: But, is it FUN?

He Said: Come with me.

So, they attended a "Last-Night-of-Webelos-Camp" Closing Campfire. First, they toured the Nature Center, the Waterfront, the Trading Post, the Rifle Range, the Handicraft Hut.

Then, they walked to the Parade Ground where she watched the Scouts, in ceremony, retire the colors. Later, they joined in singing the Grace before they sat down to eat with the Scouts in the dining room. He suggested they sit in the back row for the campfire so she could see everything that went on. She watched as the Scouts walked reverently into the Council Ring. She noticed uniforms - of Scoutmasters, of Camp Staff, of Boy Scouts, of Cub Scouts, of Den Leaders. He pointed out the various patches, and neckerchiefs, and numerals, and their meanings, to her.

She watched and listened and laughed and clapped as the Camp Staff performed silly skits. Then, marveled at the chaotic, yet controlled, group participation, as the Scouts released boyhood energy through cheers and yells - and sat in respectful silence when a leader spoke, or a prayer was recited. Though awed by the moving fire ceremony performed by Arrowmen from the Council Lodge, she was just as moved by those scouts who stood, and lined the exit paths with flashlights, as everyone returned to their campsites.

She saw it all that night. The achievement, the values, the work, the service, the excitement, the fun. She understood. She knew their son must have this, too.

They signed up that September. They signed up this September. There have been twenty years in between. Each year has had days, weeks, and months devoted to Scouting. Their son became an Eagle Scout. So did his younger brother. He and she have been both Scout Parents and Scout Leaders. The family continues to be involved in Scouting. It has given them some of their oldest, dearest, friends - and - some of their **youngest**, dearest friends (the college kids who stop by when home on break).

Their youngest son, who had heard this story many times through the years, said it best at his Eagle Court of Honor. As he ended his speech in response to the Eagle Challenge he said, "Oh, one more thing I need to mention. Thanks Dad! Smart move - taking Mom to that Campfire."

Campfire Magic

Here are some nifty little chemical additions you can use to add a little magic to your next campfire. Please remember! Leaders only should be handling these materials!

Colorful Flames

(Courtesy of Trina Bissonette... thanks for posting this to the WAGGGS-L Mailing List!)

There are several chemicals that can be placed in a fire to make the flame different colors. They are as follows:

Calcium - red flame
Copper - green flame
Sodium- orange flame
Lithium - pink flame

Potassium - purple flame
Barium - light green flame
Lean - blue flame

Magic Wishing Powder

Thanks to Deb Strathdee, who sent me this great idea! She writes:

"It is tradition in our unit to use Magic Wishing Powder to close a special campfire. I have a special container and we stand and pass it around the campfire circle. Everyone takes a small handful and holds it until everyone is ready. We make a wish, and on the count of 3, we all throw our powder into the fire. If there is magic present, we will see a sign. The wishing powder is just white granulated sugar. It creates many beautiful sparks for just a few seconds. We make sure everyone is standing back from the fire when we toss!"

Road Flare Magic

Thanks very much to Robert Britton, who e-mailed this idea to me!

Road flares are quite stable and relatively safe (these are the ones people are supposed to carry in their cars in case of an accident). The yellow powder inside can be broken down and spread on the fire in strategic places, (on top of the teepee for instance). Until it gets hot enough, it will not burn. If you set up your fire before the group gets there, it is a wonderful surprise, (it takes 2-4 minutes before it ignites in a brilliant pink glow). Experimentation is the best way to find out all the options available with this tool. Have fun, but watch your eyes; too big a pile in one place is almost as bright as the sun! 1/4 inch wide lines are better than piles in one area. It also sparkles nicely when thrown on the fire.

Spell Fire

(Courtesy of Peter Downing... thanks for posting this idea to the can.scout-guide newsgroup!)

When telling a particularly ghostly or magical story, throw a handful of powdered coffee creamer over the fire as a "spell" is being cast in the story. The particles are very fine, and being an "edible oil product" the powder catches fire in a myriad of sparkly bits that are quickly gone. Kind of cool...neat special effect.

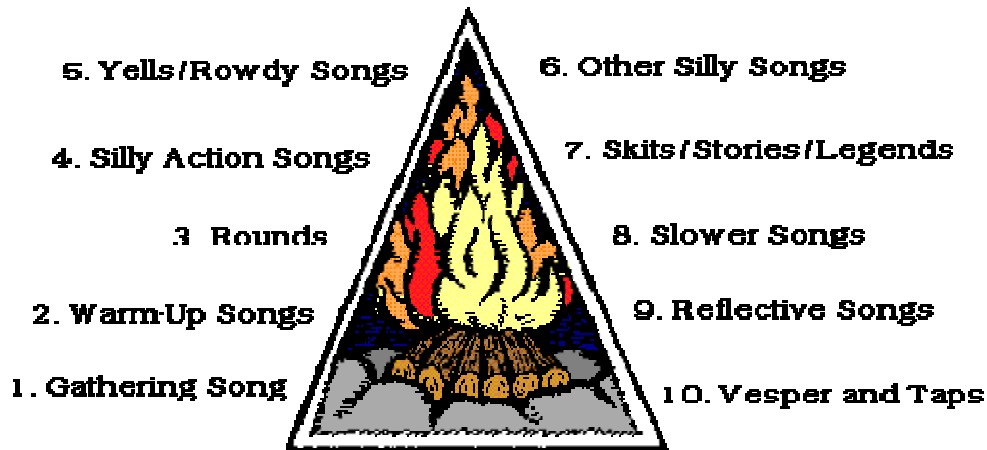
Wenceles Cakes

Here's a new Campfire Magic Idea from Loren Hebden: Get some 'blue stone', also known as copper sulfate (which can probably be obtained from a pharmacist). Mix a spoonful of powdered blue stone (*powder carefully, it is slightly toxic, wash hands after) in with enough melted wax to half fill a small wax paper muffin-baking cup. If the baking cup containing wax is then thrown into a fire, beautiful blue-green flames are seen. Should have same effect as pipe and hose, but would be better for environment and people alike!

Please note...

Finding some of the chemicals mentioned above can be hard! Beth Fausnaugh recently wrote to me to say she found some crystals that were made specifically for wood fires at a fireplace store. They were copper, so the flames were blue, green and purple. This is an easy, safe and inexpensive method of adding a little extra "spark" to your campfire.

A campfire is a very special ceremony. It has a definite beginning, middle and ending. Songs of different types are usually sung in a certain order, as illustrated below:



The purpose of this organization is to manipulate the "mood" of the singers. You start out softly, and build in volume and energy until you reach the peak of the campfire. Then, like, the flames of the fire, you slow down gradually until the closing. (Especially magical campfires occur when the flames of your fire mirror the songs you're singing: i.e. loud and crackly for the action songs and yells, slowly burning for slow songs, just embers for the vesper.) The songs in my Songbook are organized roughly in the order I use when singing them in a formal campfire. But the art of combining songs, stories and actions effectively into a campfire takes a lot of practice!

The Campfire Planning Worksheet

The Campfire Planning Worksheet is printed two-sided. The backside is where you plan the program. The front side is the program agenda, in proper order, used by the Master of Ceremonies.

Have your Dens or Patrols work on skits, songs, stunts, etc. Plan a time when a representative of each Den or Patrol will come to you with the name and type of each item that they will do. Write them on the backside, in the appropriate place, in no particular order. Make sure that if you are not familiar with something they plan to do that you have them perform it for you -- this could avoid an embarrassing situation.

When you have all possible skits, cheers, and songs -- even those that the Master of Ceremonies will lead -- written on the planning section, consider how to put them together into a program. As you read above, a Campfire Program should start slowly and quietly, build to a high level, and then taper off to a quiet closing. Bracket everything with appropriate opening and closing songs or readings. Mix up the items in the middle for variety. You might consider some stories near the end to wind things down before the closing.

In the beginning the campfire served much the same purpose as it does still today. They were a time to discuss the day's events and talk informally over some issues that were relevant to the outing. Also served as a chance to share stories and song.

Campfires are an element of Scouting that acts as a closure to the day's events. There are different approaches to the campfire. Some Scouters prefer to have formal campfires where a camp fire chief is chosen and a program is made and presented to him formally sometimes seriously and sometimes in keeping with the 'theme' of the camp. This type of campfire follows a set pattern of songs, skits and yells or cheers, with a Scouters Five or a story and some quiet songs for closing. An informal campfire is similar to a sing - a — long. The youth chat amongst themselves and with the leaders, and sing or lead songs or skits as they come to their minds. But in either format a campfire is just that, and no cooking or consuming of food is appropriate. If the leadership team and the youth want to sit around the fire after their campfire is complete you many all leave the circle and then return with your mug and snack and continue to tell your stories, but remember to declare the campfire closed before dismissing the attendees.

Songs and recitations and small plays can be performed around the campfire. Everyone should contribute something to it. it is one of the happiest hours at a camp and builds many memories.

With the campfire came the campfire blanket or robe.

These also like much else in Baden Powell's life serve many diverse purposes.

The blanket should be of a quality to last many years and withstand the elements the Scouting calendar will bring. In other words it should be warm but not too long so it drags on the ground and collects dirt and wetness from the earth.

The blanket will also be your career in color, it is a place to display all your Scouting and non-scouting achievements, camps, swimming badges, trading patches, and any other pin or patch within good taste.

A tale of history can unfold at a campfire by taking yours or someone else's, a senior youth or visitor and have them tell you about their blanket and the most memorable camps will come to life as they remember and retell stories of times gone by.

But remember not to wash your blanket to rid it off the smoke smell, that is also part of the mystic and Scouting spirit embedded in your cloth. Also some of the cheaper, older, or silk-screened crests will fade and eventually fall apart from continuous washings. Hang them along the patio or close line to freshen them up or dry them after a weekend of camping. By the way your blanket can also double as a pillow thus leaving room in your pack for more important things such as extra batteries for your game boy!

Four Spirits Campfire Opening

Four speakers as North, South, East and West

Signal all around fire for silence.

Each speaker enters from the appropriate compass point.

North: I am the spirit of the North where the great game of Guiding began.

South: I am the spirit of the South and I spread the love of Scouting & Guiding to the world.

East: I am the spirit of the East and I spread the friendship of Scouting & Guiding to the world.

West: I am the spirit of the West and I spread the worth of Guiding & Scouting to the world.

All: Together we join in the fire of friendship.

Follow with Ashes Ceremony, if desired, and then singing, ending with Taps.

The Campfire Ash Ceremony (Ashes of Friendship)

THE HISTORY: The taking of ashes from one campfire to another is a ceremony done by Girl Scouts, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts all around the world. The main purpose of these ashes is to bring to all Scouts and Guides the international aspect of the world of scouting. Ashes taken from a campfire are sprinkled into the flames of the next campfire. The next morning when the ashes are cold, they are stirred and each Scout/ Guide present at the ceremony takes some to mix with the next campfire. Each Scout/Guide keeps a list of all of the campfires that they have sprinkled their ashes in. If more than one

Scout/Guide brings ashes to the campfire, the lists are combined and the dates and places of all campfires are recorded and passed on. As Girl Scouts, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts travel, the ashes circle the globe. It is a tradition that only those actually present at the campfire can receive ashes from the ceremony to carry on to another campfire.

THE CEREMONY: We carry our friendships with us in these ashes from other campfires with comrades in other lands. May the joining of the past fires with the leaping flames of this campfire, symbolize once more the unbroken chain that binds scouts and guides of all nations together.

With greetings from our brothers and sisters around the world, I will add these ashes and the fellowship therein, to our campfire. Will anyone with campfire ashes please come forward and join me.

(Wait for others)

The ashes I spread into this campfire carry memories of past campfires dating back to _____

I will now charge these ashes to the campfire.

So that you may pass these ashes on and share them with others at your next campfire, you will be given a history of where these ashes have been. (Recite history of ashes added to fire)

Wishing Pot Ceremony

I am getting requests to explain a wishing pot ceremony, so I thought maybe I should just post it to the list.

A wishing pot ceremony is an indoor version of wishes thrown into a campfire. We use our troop's Dutch oven for the wishing pot, but any container that is fireproof and plenty big enough to hold all the wishes would be okay. Do be careful to set it on a heat-proof surface. :)

Everyone is given a small piece of paper and a pencil, and asked to write down her wish. This can be a wish for someone who is leaving, a wish for her own future, a wish for the troop. Wishes are private. No one knows the wish except the person who writes it. When a girl is through writing, she folds her paper to seal in the wish.

The wishes are collected and placed in the pot, or each girl comes to the pot and throws in her wish. After the wishes are collected, everyone is told that she must concentrate on her wish, in absolute silence, from the time the fire is lit until it goes out. Then the fire is lit. (It is effective, but not necessary, to turn out the lights at this point.)

After the fire goes out, the leader can say something appropriate such as "Believing in our wishes makes them come true" or "A wish is a prayer. The smoke carries our prayers to God." Then everyone gathers round the pot for a final circle and friendship squeeze.

This was a very special send-off for our troop member who is moving. Almost everyone cried. We have also done this very effectively in the past at a slumber party in January to begin the New Year. It could probably be done equally well in the fall when school starts again, or in the spring when girls who won't be meeting over the summer will be separating for three months.

Variations are to throw wishes into a campfire (when leader secretly adds a handful of coffee creamer to make a "poof" or sugar to create colored flames) or to make wish boats (candle on a small piece of wood) to float out to sea or across a lake. With the wish boats, girls watch them silently until the last flame goes out. Wish boats, which were a tradition at one summer camp where I worked as a counselor in the 1960's, are now discouraged because of environmental concerns.

For Thinking Day two years ago, we did a different version. Instead of using a pot, we gave everyone a votive candle in a baby food jar. (At the Dollar Tree store here, we can buy a box of ten "tea light" candles for a dollar.) We then sat on the floor in a circle, turned out all the lights, and passed a lighter from person to person. Each person said, "My wish for Girl Scouts and

Girl Guides everywhere is . . ." and lit her candle. When all the candles were burning, we asked the girls to concentrate on their wishes in silence for a few minutes and then blow out the candles. After blowing out the candles, we stood up and did our final circle and friendship squeeze.

Sheryl Alleger, NW Florida: Ashes taken from a campfire are sprinkled into the flames of the next campfire. The next morning when the ashes are cold, they are stirred and each Scout takes some with her to mix with her next campfire. If more than one Scout brings ashes to the campfire, the lists are combined; the dates and places of all campfires are recorded and passed on. As Scouts travel, the ashes circle the globe. It is a tradition that only those actually present at the campfire can receive the ashes.

We carry our fellowship with us from other campfires with our comrades in other lands.

"May the joining of the deaf fires with leaping flames symbolize once more the unbroken chain that binds Scouts around the world - with greetings from Scouts everywhere. So that you may pass these ashes on and share them with others at your next campfire, here is the history of where these ashes have been."

The Campfire Ashes

Legend has it that Lord Baden-Powell would always take a small amount of ashes from the campfire and spread these ashes into the next campfire. The main purpose of these ashes is to bring to all Scouts and Scouters the International aspect of the world brotherhood of Scouting.

Ashes taken from a campfire are sprinkled into the flames of the next Campfire. The next morning, when the ashes are cold, they are stirred, and each scout takes some along to mix with his next campfire. If more than one Scout brings ashes to the same campfire, the lists are pooled, with the dates and places of all campfires recorded and passed on.

It is traditional that only those present at the ceremony carry ashes from that ceremony.

The Campfire Ash Ceremony

"We carry our friendships with us in these ashes from other campfires with comrades in other lands. May the joining of the past fires with the leaping flames of this campfire, symbolize once more the unbroken chain that binds scouts and guides of all nations together. With Greeting from our brothers and sisters around the world, I will add these ashes, and the fellowship therein, to our campfire. Will anyone with campfire ashes please come forward and join me.

(Wait for others)

The ashes I spread into this campfire carry memories of past campfires dating back to <year>. I will now charge these ashes to this campfire.