

Thank you for anything you can do to help promote the cause of Summer Camps. I would be delighted to hear from you if you have any questions, or if you would like me to meet you and tell you more about it, or (better still) if you would like to come and see for yourself .

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How Summer Camps Could Change Britain



**by Christopher M. Green
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Some ways in which a larger national programme of well-run, imaginative and creative Summer Camps would change Britain:

America has a large programme, as does France. In both countries Summer Camps are a valued part of their national provision for children and young people. But in Britain less than 2% of youngsters ever attend a Summer Camp. Opposite are some of the very real benefits which would follow if we had a larger national programme with many more children taking part.

(By “a Summer Camp” I mean a 7 - 10 day residential holiday for children aged usually 8 -15, drawn from all areas and backgrounds, with imaginative, energetic and creative activities, both outdoor and indoor, from exploring the countryside or tracking games in the woods to drama sessions or stories round the fire, away from TVs or computers. Many of the staff are volunteers aged 17- 25).

A flourishing Summer Camps sector would have all sorts of desirable spin-offs for the education world in addition to its main function. Over the past few years ATE has run Maths Fundays in schools, a well-attended Conference on “Fun, Creativity and Imagination in Education”, and a number of courses for teachers who would like to use more games and active methods in their classrooms. In June 2010 ATE will be running a five-day residential for a Year 6 in a Nottinghamshire primary school together with the same year-group in their partner French école primaire – possibly a first, and an initiative which could have much to offer if and when the traditional foreign exchange becomes more problematical to organise. The enormous expertise and repertoire of games, songs and other activities built up over the years by Colony Holidays and ATE is a valuable national resource, which could be useful in many contexts.

British society in 2010 is so diverse and so complex (and the Press and lobby groups of all kinds so vociferous) that it must be a nightmare for Ministers and Members of Parliament to decide what social initiatives and changes they would like to get going, or how on earth they can be made effective in the real world. Promoting the benefits of residential Summer Camps is something that could be done in addition to anything else, and that would make a real difference without costing public money. Summer Camps providers would of course like to grow and flourish, but only because they believe so strongly in the benefits Summer Camps can offer.

Any support that can be given to the cause of well-run residential Summer Camps will help to transform the lives of any children or young volunteers who may be persuaded to take part by government “nudging”, by press coverage, or by their parents hearing about it in a positive way. If we could move from 2% to 10% or 20% of British youngsters being involved, many of the apparently intractable problems facing our society would be significantly reduced. Lots more of our young people, from all classes, backgrounds and areas, would have their lives enriched, socially, personally, and educationally. We would reap the benefit in very many ways.

Experience of management:

“I joined Colony Holidays in 1970 and stayed involved for ten years. It was a unique experience, and had a great influence on my work as Headmaster of Northampton School for Boys. Few days went by in that job when some aspect of my training and work with Colony Holidays did not come in useful. I am sure that my experience in directing summer camps, and thus having great responsibility at a young age, helped prepare me for the work of a Head.”

Sir Bruce Liddington, recently DCSF Schools Commissioner.

“I was a Monitor, Assistant Director and Director with Colony Holidays in the 1980s, and am now Production Manager with Glaxo Wellcome, married with three children. From Colony Holidays I learned first hand that you get out of life what you put in. I gained self-confidence from being myself, and being appreciated for what I am and can contribute. I learned how much a close group of people with a common purpose and the will to succeed can achieve against the most difficult obstacles. In business good teamwork and leadership are crucial, and training and development in those areas are valued highly. Looking back I can honestly say that my Colony Holidays training and experience, while I was a student then newly employed, were more powerful and more worthwhile than any management training I have received. Finally, the fun, emotion and magic of the holidays I worked on stay with me today, reminding me that working with people, and particularly for the benefit of children, is the most rewarding thing one can do.” **Nick Maishman.**

Working really hard:

“Since I trained as a Monitor in 1993, my commitment to ATE, and my belief in what it stands for, has grown and grown. The benefits I have received are vast, and I now realise the immense potential not only in the field of education for children but also in training young people. From ATE I have learned to play again, work hard for something I believe in, to take responsibility, to be tactful and diplomatic, to believe in myself and in my ability to encourage, enthuse and lead young people, while keeping them safe and being their friend. I want to see many more young people benefit as I have”. **Helen Fairest, working in the NHS.**

“Now that I am looking back over thirty years to the start of my Colony Holidays experience, I am more acutely aware than ever of the value of the perspectives and insights which I gained. At the very core was the respect for the individual worth of every child. There was never any compromise of the axiom that, given a challenging, exciting, kindly and supportive environment, every child can learn, grow in confidence, and develop the sort of self-esteem which produces capability and humanity in adult life.”

Peter Wootton Head of Department in a Secondary School.

- It would help our **social integration and understanding**, by enabling young people to meet others from different schools and backgrounds, in a setting where class or ethnic labels have no relevance. It could help youngsters who feel “at the bottom of the heap” to see they do have a real place in society.
- It would improve **the self-image, confidence and independence of all the youngsters who take part**, at an age when they are open to change, helping them to believe in their own potential and to become successful adults.
- It would offer **time and space to play and enjoy being children**, to discover new hobbies and interests, and to find out that **active learning can be fun**.
- Children (and young staff) would see that there are **far better ways of enjoying life than being riotous or drunk**. Summer Camps would help counteract the over-commercialisation of the world for children today.
- It would offer **valuable insights into civic responsibility**. A Summer Camp is a micro-society with rights and responsibilities easily understood.
- It would help children and young people to develop **common sense, a feel for what really matters, and an appreciation of what is true and beautiful**.
- It would give us **more and better young teachers, and improved parenting skills**, by enabling many more of our 17 - 21 year-olds to train and to work with children in the context of a happy holiday.
- Those staff who go on to further training and to take charge of a camp would gain invaluable **experience of management** at a young and formative age.
- Young staff would often find they can achieve more than they ever thought possible, and so be encouraged to **aim high in their own lives and careers**.
- Young staff would enjoy **working really hard for something they believe in**.

This booklet explains why I am certain a national system of well-run Summer Camps would offer such important benefits to Britain’s children and young people, and how it could be achieved without major public funding.

Please read on.

1. What is unique about Summer Camps.

Most informed educational opinion believes that residential experience is of vital importance in the learning and development of young people. Sir Tim Brighouse recently said “A week living away with others can often be worth a term spent in school – that is how dramatic the effect can be on children’s learning and development.”

Most British youngsters today probably do experience some form of residential session during their schooldays. Lots of schools and Education Authorities place a high priority on offering such sessions to as many children as possible.

These “school trips”, (like scout camps, youth group weekends away, etc.), provide great benefits for those who take part, not least in cementing relationships with each other and with the adults involved. The time away together can be prepared in advance, followed up afterwards, and have a good effect on both the learning and the community side of the school, scout pack or youth group.

This type of residential session is by its nature always for pre-existing groups of young people who know each other already from school or club, and is staffed by adults they also already know. The whole experience is a part (potentially a very valuable part) of a continuing relationship between the participants which existed before the residential session and continues afterwards.

This is all quite admirable, and to be encouraged. **But we should not forget that another kind of residential opportunity also exists, with benefits which are not exactly the same but at least as great. Attending a Summer Camp offers children and young people the chance to spend a happy and positive week with others they do not yet know and would otherwise never be likely to meet.**

It is important to understand the implications of this crucial distinction between a “school trip” and a Summer Camp. Children coming to a school trip bring with them their reputation from school. Even teachers may well be thinking “Oh God, will Tommy get up to his usual tricks?” At a Summer Camp, on the other hand, everyone starts with a blank slate and as equals because nobody knows anyone else. Youngsters have to get to know new people, some very different from them, make new friends, fit into a new structure, and often have a go at new activities. If, as almost always happens, the Summer Camp ends with everyone feeling one big group of friends and one happy family, a significant part of the pleasure they all feel at being part of it is a sense of achievement at having managed to get on well with others from all backgrounds who they had not met a week before.

Civic Responsibility:

“I really liked being in an atmosphere where no one was judged for what clothes they wore or how they spoke. I really liked being with such a variety of children, all of them so friendly.”

Briony, Sutton Coldfield.

“Your community is a state in miniature. Everyone must be learning really valuable citizenship skills.”

President Sarkozy after visiting a French summer camp in 2007.

Good sense, feeling for what matters:

“I admired the way that simple activities, organised with their help, would bring them together in an enjoyable and uncompetitive way. He benefited SO MUCH from the experience.”

Mrs. L., Northampton.

“I have known and admired the educational thinking behind Colony Holidays and ATE for many years. The best thing of all about these holidays is the chance they give to children to exercise their imagination. In a surprisingly short time they begin to enjoy shared creative activity. The possibility of this imaginative pleasure can carry over into the rest of their lives.”

Baroness Mary Warnock DBE, who sent her own children to Colony Holidays, and is ATE’s President.

More and better teachers, better parenting:

“Colony Holidays had a profound effect on how I see and do things. As a teacher and a parent it helped me realise that learning and teaching can be real fun. On Colony Holidays I saw children show excitement and interest in activities in a way I rarely witnessed in schools. This was because of the safe, caring environment which was created, and the imaginative way in which things were presented.” **Sir David Green KCMG, recently Director General the British Council.**

“I trained as a monitor with Colony Holidays while I was at Oxford and determined I was not going to teach. It sounded fun to go to various holiday centres during my vacations and better than the local factory. From that initial training course I was hooked - on children, on co-operative work, and on education. While doing my PGCE I trained as an Assistant Director. This course had a powerful effect on my development. The areas of self-knowledge, assertiveness, leadership and co-operation were brilliantly drawn together in a course which was more effective than any professional development training I have done since. Without Colony Holidays I would not be where I am now - a Senior Teacher and a City Councillor”. **Alison Noble.**

10. Conclusion.

Many thanks for reading this far, if you have done.

May I add some quotes which illuminate the potential benefits I listed at the start. All of them (apart from President Sarkozy's) are from parents, children or staff who have recently been part of ATE, or from people looking back on their Colony Holidays experiences twenty or thirty years later.

Social Integration and Understanding:

"She has made friends with a wide range of people her own age over the years, and from all over the country. She has been coming for five years, and on each occasion she has returned full of the things she has done and the new friends she has made. Thank you for looking after her so well and giving her experiences that we could not". **Mrs. L., Leicester.**

"When I arrived I sussed out who I wanted to be friends with and who I wanted to avoid. After a few days I realised even the ones I had decided to avoid were good to be friends with too."

David, Stafford.

Self-image, Confidence, Independence:

"My son had a fab time, and has come back with an 'I can try anything' attitude, which he didn't have before." **Mrs. B., Worcester.**

"Ben came home saying that the people at your Performing Arts holiday were 'the nicest people I have ever met'. His self-esteem has had a real boost, and he had the best time of his life". **Mrs. H., Surrey**

Time and Space to play:

"Thank you, thank you, for giving my children back some real childhood, and the chance to run about and play in green fields, which they almost never experience in the urban world of today."

Mrs. G., Manchester.

"Summer camps remind children that they are allowed to BE children, and to have fun with no pressure to be older, cooler or more fashionable."

Kate J, Oxford graduate just entering teaching.

Better ways of enjoying life:

"It is a brilliant scheme, and has helped Molly tremendously. The spontaneous singing at the end of the performance is a treasured memory which will stay with me forever. The sight of so many young people enjoying themselves brought tears to my eyes. For Molly to be so disinhibited and just enjoying the moment without concern I think was amazing." **Mrs. M., Worcestershire.**

"I don't think I have ever seen so many happy, happy people in one place enjoying each other's company before."

Katie L., young teacher.

If a girl from a smart school in Surrey is in the next bed to one from a rough inner-city school, with labels removed so that instead of being "posh school girl" and "rough school girl" they are just Jane and Sue, they may well end up best of friends, and both gain immeasurably from their time together.

A Summer Camp is an opportunity (and few such exist in our society) for a youngster to venture outside his own group, his own tribe and comfort zone for a short period, and get to know others whose lives may be based on very different assumptions and rules. The week at camp offers a rich mix of new and valuable experiences, based not only on being part of a group from diverse backgrounds, but also on seeing new places, trying new activities or new ways of doing things, and on enjoying laughter, imagination and having fun together.

Trevor Phillips remarked some years ago that a system of summer camps could do wonders for community relations in giving to children from minority groups the chance to live closely for a short period with others from all walks of British life, and to get to know them as real friends, away from everyday constraints. There is a creative and therapeutic joy in playing and laughing together under a blue sky, with the space to run about and enjoy being young. Our society can still be obstinately tribal, with whole groups being written off as "yobs", "snobs", "southern pansies", "rough northerners", and much worse. It is only by meeting each other as real people and having fun together that the growing generation can understand the pleasure and the reassurance of their common humanity.





2. Who staffs Summer Camps?

A vital aspect of summer camps is the work done by young volunteer staff in looking after the youngsters. In the summer camps I know (I will explain my history later) a “monitor” aged usually 17 to 20 will be allocated a group of 6 or 8 children to look after. He / she is known as Jim or Annie, and lives as a full member of the group, being with them almost all the time. Being the age they are, monitors are not felt to be “like teachers”, rather older brother or sister figures. However, by being always there they pre-empt many safety or behaviour problems before they start, and are able to deal with others that arise at once. For many children the relationship with “their” monitor is a vital part of the summer camp. To have an 18 year-old there for them all the time, joining in their games, chatting and joking with them, getting to know them and caring for them while also making sure they get on with each other and benefit from the holiday, is both very reassuring and great fun.

As well as the monitors there will be two or three Camp Leaders or managers to oversee the whole camp as Directors or Assistant Directors, plus a Matron figure (often a trained nurse), also catering and domestic staff.

In the summer camp system I know best (where the training policy is modelled on the French state-supervised system) young people wanting to volunteer for work as Monitors compulsorily attend an intensive residential training week, in which they are taught stocks of games, songs, and ideas for children’s activities, they have talks and discussions about many aspects of looking after children residentially, from safety and hygiene to dealing with upsets or disputes, and they also experience for themselves the kind of community which the children will be living at camp. A very few may be turned down after the course (as not being yet ready to handle the responsibility). Everyone leaves with a good repertoire of ideas and resources, and also with a real belief in the potential of the work they will be doing to change children’s lives for the better.

9. Coordination and Control.

Clearly there would need to be some control over summer camps providers if more parents were to be encouraged to send children. BAHA has its own inspectors who conduct Health and Safety audits of BAHA members. Colony Holidays had an HMI “Assessor” attached to it by the government, and she kept an eye on what was happening.

It would be good if such control was not of the kind to inhibit creativity or different ways of working. Everyone understands that staff need to be CRB checked, that sensible risk assessments need to be in place, and that children’s safety, both physical and emotional, needs to be given top priority. But in my view the best kind of control should first have a good look at what an organisation is doing, in the way of training staff, codes of practice, ethos and educational values, then ask questions, and finally make suggestions or even criticise where appropriate (this was exactly what Colony Holidays’ HMI used to do). If control took the form of people coming in with predetermined tick lists, or wanting to substitute their own ways of working for perfectly satisfactory ones already in place, creativity and originality (which are vital ingredients of a good educational experience) would be damaged.

Any system of control being put in place should concentrate first and foremost on the selection of staff and the training being given to them. This above all makes summer camps what they are, and guarantees children will be properly looked after.



- To nudge LOCAL TRUSTS, ROUND TABLES OR ROTARY CLUBS, LOCAL FIRMS, etc., with a suggestion they might look at sponsoring a few children from their area who could not otherwise afford the cost, would help make the holidays more of a social mix.
- To nudge PRESS AND MEDIA, BOTH LOCAL AND NATIONAL, might lead to more publicity about the opportunities that exist. Some good articles by journalists who had visited summer camps would certainly interest parents.
- To nudge INDEPENDENT BOARDING SCHOOLS, FIELD STUDY CENTRES, etc., and suggest they might allow their premises to house summer camps during school holidays would help make more suitable venues available for use.
- To nudge CELEBRITIES FROM THE ARTS OR SPORTS WORLD to try Summer Camps for their own children, and then to let everyone know if they had had a great time, would help promote the idea that going to Summer Camps is a cool thing to do.
- To nudge SIXTH FORMERS, TRAINEE TEACHERS, etc., with the idea that training and working with children in summer camps is a good thing to do would help increase the supply of suitable staff.

One of the disheartening problems in promoting summer camps today is the unwillingness of almost every official body to recommend anything at all, however worthwhile, in case something were to go wrong and they might be held guilty by association. To get rid of such an attitude would be a major step forward not only for summer camps but for national good sense in general. To reassure parents that something of real value to which they might send their children is not going to be a hotbed of child abuse or a traumatic disaster, because “you read such awful things in the press”, would be a healthy move towards giving young people more of the experiences they need to grow and thrive. While parents feel unable to let children out of their sight “for fear of meeting something worse”, youngsters miss out on experiences which would help them towards greater self-confidence and successful independence. To be prepared to find out what is valuable and then say so might start to make a dent in the widespread feeling that the policy of most public bodies towards those under their care is determined first and foremost by “covering their back” and making sure that if anyone is going to be sued it is not them.

There are some excellent Summer Camp providers in Britain, ready and willing to expand what they do for children, and to change the lives of many more young people if they could be helped to grow and reach more potential beneficiaries. This surely is a situation where “nudging” by government and the education establishment could make a real difference.

Volunteers then typically give a couple of weeks a year to working in summer camps. Some only do one year, some stay involved for many years. A Monitor who has worked successfully on at least three separate sessions, and who has reached the age of 21, may then be invited to attend a further week of training to work as Assistant Director (deputy head as it were) of a camp. These courses prepare for a lead role in the staff team, and for organising activities for a whole camp together. After working successfully in this capacity on at least three occasions, suitable people are then invited for yet a third training week to take overall charge of a camp as Director. Directors may be any age from 24 upwards. Most are under 40, and still enjoy joining in children’s games and activities. Many (but by no means all) are teachers who give a week of their summer holidays. They like the more informal relationship with young people, and the opportunity to have fun together.

The Monitors (who very much enjoy giving up part of their vacations to work with children and work devotedly to make it a success) are wonderful role-models for the children under their care. Equally the Directors are often great role-models for young Monitors. The whole staff team have a great time working together for the benefit of the children, and they can form a real bond of mutual support and friendship. This rubs off on everyone there.

Training is of course the key to success, and all summer camp staff must be trained to a high standard of competence, common sense and responsibility. As with the best staff in any context, they appear to the children to be happy and relaxed people, good fun, and enjoying themselves. But underneath there must be a thoroughly serious approach to children’s safety, welfare, and long term best interests.

Critics who have never seen a summer camp often express doubts whether eighteen year-olds with just one week’s training are capable of taking this kind of responsibility. We who have regularly lived many happy and beneficial sessions in summer camps know they can. Colony Holidays and ATE (of which more later) have between them run holidays for nearly 100,000 children and young people over forty years, looked after by more than 10,000 young monitors. All have been kept quite safe not only physically but emotionally as well. There has never been a serious accident or incident, nor any significant complaint from a parent which has been found to be justified. **What there have been is many thousands of letters from parents and children paying tribute to the fun, the happiness, the new confidence, the new ideas and interests, and the improved life skills in general that youngsters have gained from their holidays, and from their contact with the young staff.**

3. How people spend their time in summer camps.

Summer Camps are usually run in buildings rather than tents. The premises used may be boarding schools, field study centres, etc., rented for the holidays, or Youth Hostels, or purpose built centres. Most are in country areas, and have large grounds.

The Outdoor Manifesto, and the various documents produced recently by the English Outdoor Council, are warmly to be welcomed. They are absolutely right to stress the importance of getting young people involved in outdoor activities of all kinds, both to help with fitness and counteract obesity, and to enrich their whole lives in all sorts of ways. Summer Camp providers completely support this campaign. The opportunity to run about in green fields and to enjoy the great outdoors must be an important ingredient of any summer camp.

Many of the commercial summer camp providers base their activity programmes round the traditional “outdoor pursuits”, from canoeing and abseiling to pony trekking or rock climbing. Such programmes can give memorable new experiences to young people, and often set them up with lifelong interests and hobbies.

There is however room for programmes not based mainly or at all round these types of activity. Not every child will be attracted by the more adventurous activities, or at least not until they have been to a few camps and feel more confident in general. The summer camp movement should provide for a frail artistic child or a weedy intellectual child just as much as for a tough outdoor one.

There is real value in camps with one main activity, such as a Performing Arts Camp, a Science and Robotics Camp, or an Improve Your Tennis Camp. I have run many such camps, and they have been very successful. I have experienced some wonderful Children’s Literature Camps, for members of the Puffin Club in the great days of Kaye Webb and Puffin Post. Fifty children from all over Britain who loved reading spent a ten day holiday together, and such authors as Joan Aiken, Ian Serrailier and Clive King would spend a few days with us. A Performing Arts Camp, or a Choral Singing Camp, which ends with a performance or concert for parents, is also very much enjoyed and successful.

However there is also a place for camps with a varied, “bit of everything” activity programme. To go from making a kite or a marionette after breakfast to playing a large outdoor ball game all together, then a singing session, then lunch, then a period of drawing or painting to let lunch go down, then a swim, then a fantasy game all over the grounds looking for clues to where the smugglers have hidden their contraband, then some indoor games, then

I went to see the YHA and told them that, should we be successful, we hoped they would continue with and grow their system of summer camps in cooperation with the Trust.

Sadly, for technical reasons, this bid was not able to be entertained.

So now, with Do It 4 Real money due to end after this summer, are we back to square one? It is not likely in the current climate that any government will feel able to earmark any funding for summer camps, especially since so much money has been given over the past eight years.

Nevertheless, I still feel very positive about how much difference summer camps could make in the current state of British society, and believe a real step forward could be achieved without spending public money. “Government nudging” seems to be an in phrase at the moment, and I feel sure that the right sort of nudging could achieve a great deal. I set out in the next section how I think it could work.

8. What could be done by nudging?

It would be a very good first step for the DCSF, or some other appropriate agency, officially to have a look at the summer camps world – to visit holidays and training courses, and to meet with operators, (not, please, to send each organisation a form with boxes to tick!), to understand by seeing it the value of what is being done, and the potential to use the expertise which is out there now for the benefit of more young people from all backgrounds.

It was following a day’s visit to an ATE session in 2001 that the DfES put the organisation forward to take part in Get Real. The DfES visitor was very impressed by what she saw, (and indeed sent her own children to ATE the following summer).

- To nudge SCHOOLS and LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITIES would be very helpful. Often ATE approaches schools and asks to be allowed to tell pupils and parents about its programme of summer camps. If schools knew that it was officially thought a good thing for their pupils to hear about such opportunities, or if Local Authorities knew they would have DCSF backing for circulating details of summer camp opportunities to schools, more parents would certainly get to know about them.
- To nudge PARENTS THEMSELVES would help too. Many would be more willing to give summer camps a try for their children if they thought the idea was supported and approved by the education and child care authorities.

7. How can we get more children to take part?

After many years of trying to raise the profile of summer camps and meeting lots of ill-informed reluctance and fear by parents and schools, I believe that what is now needed is a sustained effort to “change hearts and minds”, and to convince more people that their youngsters stand to gain enormously by taking part in summer camps. Very often when you actually have the attention of a group of parents and you explain the benefits, their reaction is “why have we never heard about this before?” If going to summer camp became really “cool”, and if parents felt their children were missing out by not taking part, the numbers would soon grow. Existing good providers of all kinds would be able to expand and flourish, and exciting new initiatives would also come along.

It was with this in mind I invited representatives from all the summer camp operators I could find to a meeting in London at the end of 2006 to see if we could establish some kind of National Association. I hoped such a group could maybe combine their forces and their marketing expertise to put across a powerful general message about all the potential benefits. The meeting was well attended, and there was enthusiasm for the idea. However, in the end we were not able to agree, mainly because BAHA and CCI did not want to see “yet another organisation in the field”. They felt the English Outdoor Council already grouped many significant players, and that any lobbying on summer camps should be left to them.

I am grateful to the many people (from BAHA, CCI, the YHA, and many individual operators) who kindly supported me in this attempt, and who, even when they did not feel able to back a formal move, assured me of their enthusiastic backing for what I was trying to do.

I attempted to bid for the 2009 – 2010 Do It 4 Real contract in the name of The Summer Camps Trust, which would have been established as a new charity had we been successful. I got together a number of people who have worked with Colony Holidays and ATE, and with the right backgrounds to oversee such an organisation properly (an inner city headteacher, the ex-director of a merchant bank, a chartered accountant, an ex-senior executive from Coopers and Lybrand, a teacher of handicapped children in Manchester, and a young advanced skills teacher). We put forward the vision of a Trust whose role is to promote the development of summer camps in Britain, to raise training standards and safety standards overall, to offer to all existing and future providers (provided they could offer a week’s holiday including travel for £300 or less) membership of the scheme and subsidies to help poorer children take part. We had in mind a suitably dynamic and forceful person to be Chief Executive. We also said that £1 million of the Do It 4 Real money each year would be spent on a massive campaign of PR, to change hearts and minds, seeing this as a better way of achieving growth and long term sustainability than offering places at a reduced rate to parents who could afford the full cost.

supper, then a drama evening, then singing and stories at bedtime, means there is always something different to look forward to, and the day contains something for everyone. Such a programme also presupposes everyone has a go at everything, which draws the whole community together in a unique way. Even in a nominally Science or Robotics Camp, youngsters need other activities as well as the “specialist” sessions, and they enjoy the running about and the singing just as much as making their robot.

One of the good things about a summer camp is that it has no set curriculum or programme of work to be covered, and this gives real freedom to follow up young people’s interests or local possibilities. I have seen a camp where youngsters became fascinated by local wild life, following the visit of a naturalist, and which ended with an enormous exhibition of bark rubbings, leaf collages, plaster casts of animal tracks, wild flowers, drawings of wild animals seen, etc., opened by the naturalist and visited by a good number of parents and local people. At another camp we were given the opportunity to put on a floodlit pageant at a local historic building, and at another to do street theatre in a nearby town. All these activities were led by the enthusiasm of the youngsters, and helped by the team of monitors, to produce a genuinely high quality result.

One crucial function of the activities is of course to act as a group dynamic, to help everyone make friends and feel valued. When you have hunted for clues to hidden treasure together, acted together, sung together and played games together, you have plenty to talk about and soon become friends. When you have surprised yourself by finding that you can make something, draw, swim or act, as well as or better than someone from a supposedly much more prestigious school, you feel a more valued member of the community and able to hold your head up with anyone. But activities are also important in their own right. A child who discovers the pleasure in singing or making something, or who finds to his surprise that ball games or acting can after all be fun, or that he has skills and talents he had not known about, has gained something of real and lasting value from his time at summer camp.

I am very ready to confess that a good summer camp can be a kind of educational “con trick”. None of the staff there seem like teachers. The whole atmosphere seems to say: “this is a holiday, it’s nothing like school, so just relax and have a laugh”, but then it gets children playing team games, doing projects together, singing, acting, making things, walking to see a castle or ancient earthwork, all as part of a fun holiday. Since children often show more enthusiasm for what is on offer at camp than they do for school lessons, they can be helped to find the fun in all these activities, and to discover new interests and talents they never thought they had. Summer camps can show children real enjoyment beyond television or computer games, and help them acquire more resources for a full and happy life, as well as a more positive attitude to all sorts of things.

4. What exists in Britain now?

Many educators and administrators would entirely accept the arguments set out above, and would like to see the summer camps sector grow. There are some good quality summer camps on offer now, and a couple of attempts have been made to get something going on a larger scale.

Peter Gordon Lawrence enjoyed taking youngsters camping in France in the nineteen sixties, and set up PGL as a full-time commercial provider of summer camps. It is now a large organisation, and has been joined by other commercial bodies (Camp Beaumont, XKeys, Mill on the Brue, etc.). These bodies at first offered mainly residential summer camps (often on the American model), but have now been compelled to diversify after difficulty in recruiting enough youngsters for their summer camps. Most of their work today is school residentials. Some offer day camps (where children are offered a non-residential day at a time activity programme in towns and cities around the U.K.) The commercial organisations which run activity centres and all different kinds of sessions for schools or holiday groups are mainly members of the British Activity Holidays Association (BAHA).

Religious based summer camps, run by such organisations as the Scripture Union and Pathfinders, cater for several thousand children each year, recruited mainly from local churches and religious groups. They mix children from different backgrounds, and run some very successful camps. They are almost all members of Christian Camps International (CCI). There is also a system of Jewish summer camps.

A small number of charitable Trusts (as Forest School Camps and the Woodcraft Folk) have existed since the nineteen thirties and still run a few holidays every year.

These various organisations have all built up their own expertise in delivering successful residential camps, and many have long experience of doing so.

There have been two major attempts to get summer camps going on a larger scale. The first, in which I have been very much involved, has been Colony Holidays and its successor body the Active Training and Education Trust (ATE).

will lead to a long term growth in summer camps depends on how far the YHA will be willing or able to sustain their programme when the subsidy goes. They have assured everyone that they have lots of plans for doing so, but more recently have been saying they cannot see how it can be sustainable without more public money. This is in no way to devalue the good work they have done in giving worthwhile holidays to 60,000 children, mixing children from different backgrounds, introducing children to outdoor activities, etc. But it is in my view a shame that they have not used their privileged position as lead agents and as recipients of far more public money than has ever before been put into summer camps, to try and lead the whole summer camps world forward rather than to establish a YHA brand with which, whether they like it or not, everyone else has had no option but to compete.



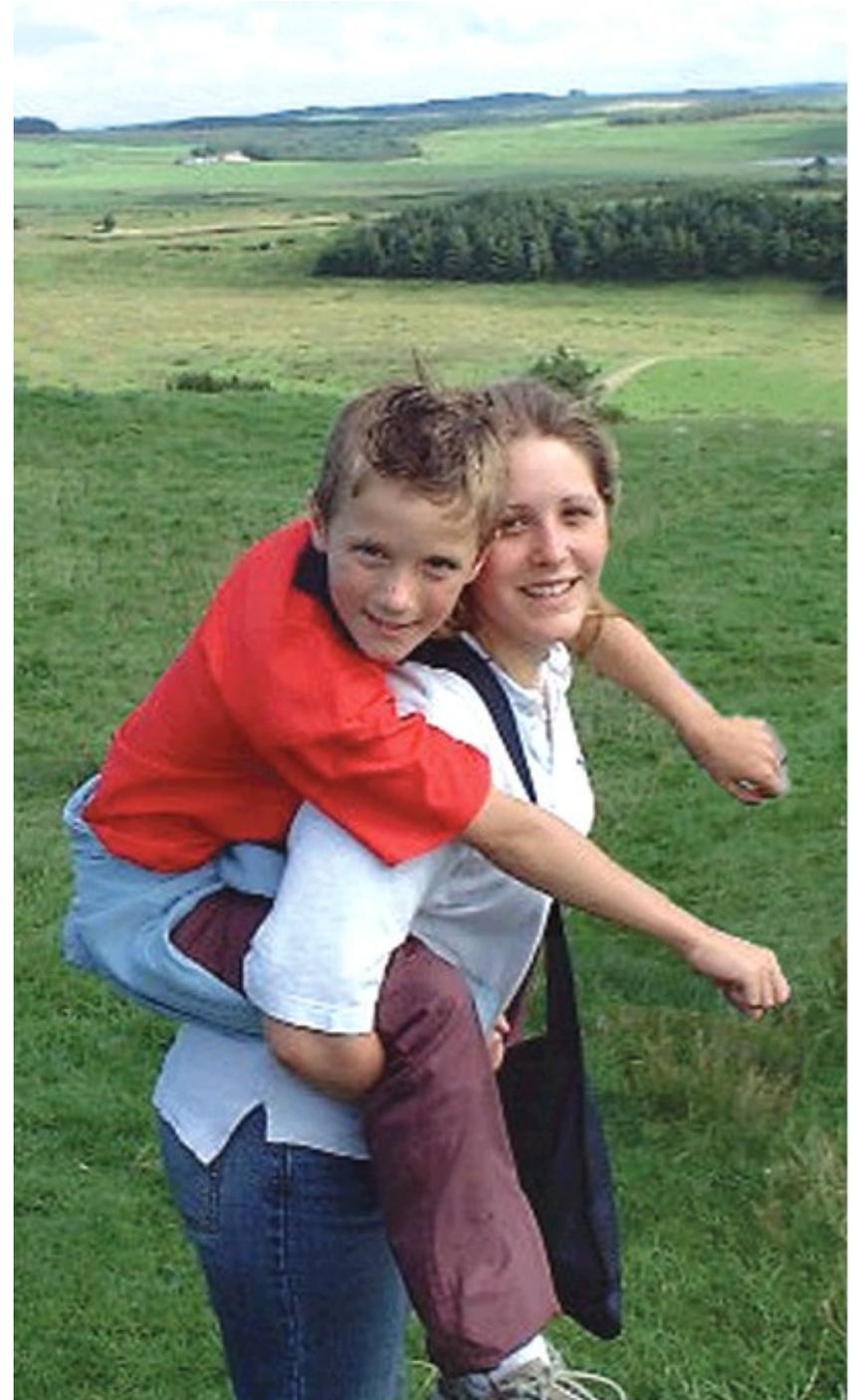
Association. The YHA had not run summer camps at all until then, but were well placed to start doing so, with suitable premises all over the country and lots of experience with school groups. The YHA elected not to subcontract places to other providers who could then work in their own way, as had happened for the first two years, but to produce a new single “brand” of summer camps, almost all in youth hostels and lasting only four or five days. Other providers who ran YHA camps had to follow this pattern and keep to rules laid down by the YHA. Some providers did become involved, but others found they could not work within the rigid YHA framework.

To staff their summer camps the YHA sought via a staff finding agency people from all over the world who had been trained and worked in American summer camps.

Their recruitment was very successful, and some 20,000 young people took part in the 2005 and 2006 camps. The YHA, who had to put a whole system in place from a standing start in a few months, are to be congratulated on doing so with outstanding success, and many children had a wonderful experience. The way things had worked out, however, was decidedly unhelpful to ATE and other providers. Having been encouraged by the Big Lottery to prepare for a substantial increase in numbers for 2005, ATE in the end received no children at all from Do It 4 Real, and also had to compete with the YHA to recruit its own customers, with the extra handicap that the price of YHA holidays was heavily subsidised.

In 2007 there was uncertainty as to whether money would or would not be available to continue Do It 4 Real. In the end the Big Lottery did find some, and the YHA was asked at the last minute to deliver another programme. At this stage the DfES decided to take back from the Big Lottery responsibility for the programme, and to seek new bids for the contract in 2009 – 2010. (They decided there was not time to have a new bidding process for 2008, and asked the YHA to carry on one more year.) This new bidding process was to emphasise sustainability, and prospective bidders were asked to spell out how they would ensure that the scheme continued after the end of DfES funding. The DfES (by then becoming DCSF) held a series of helpful meetings to which everyone who could be involved was invited, and views were sought on how the bidding process should work.

When the bids were assessed the YHA was once again successful. This means that by autumn 2010 they will have continued for six years to operate basically the same scheme, i.e. to use government or Lottery money to run a programme of subsidised holidays for 10,000 children or so per year, staffed mainly by people who have worked in America, all lasting for 4 or 5 days, almost all in Youth Hostels. Other providers have overall probably been weakened by the scheme (ATE has had several parents saying “He would love to come again, but the YHA is so much cheaper”). Thus whether the scheme



5. Colony Holidays and ATE.

In the nineteen fifties and sixties many British students went to France to work in “colonies de vacances”, rather as today’s students go to Camp America. I went to France several times, and was impressed by what was being offered (in those days over 5 million French children from all backgrounds went to colonies each year). In the early sixties we lobbied British officialdom, saying that something of the kind would have a great deal to offer here. As a result in 1963 the Council for Colony Holidays for Schoolchildren was established, with a launching grant from the then Ministry of Education, and with a governing Council of representatives from all the main educational Associations under Sir John Wolfenden’s chairmanship. Two of us left teaching to start full-time operations in 1965. Over the following sixteen years holidays were run for around 80,000 children, and training courses for over 10,000 young leaders were developed which were praised as “good practice” by several HMI. Holidays were run for a number of affiliated bodies, notably the Puffin Club, the National Trust, Birmingham Settlement, Manchester University Settlement, and the WRVS. An offshoot (Discovery Holidays) was set up in Northern Ireland, which took 2000 children from all backgrounds each year. Some 1500 children each year were paid for by Local Education Authorities. Over a hundred talented young educators went all through the system to become directors and run the holidays; many of them have gone on to do good work as headteachers, or as managers in other contexts, and they have acknowledged how much their later work benefited from the training and experience they had had with Colony Holidays.

In many ways Colony Holidays was a tremendous success, and we still hear regularly from many people who came as children or monitors, saying what an important part of their childhood and their growing up Colony Holidays were. But despite all our efforts the numbers only reached 6000 or 7000 a year, and there was still reluctance by many parents to trust their children to “people they did not know”.

After those of us who had set up CCHS returned to teaching in the early eighties, and handed the organisation over to younger leadership, it ran into financial difficulty, and closed in 1985. The new management did not resolve the problem of the appropriate fee level in a non-subsidised set-up, so as to appear good value but have enough to run the organisation.

ATE, founded as a successor body in 1996, under the chairmanship of Baroness Warnock (who sent her own children to Colony Holidays and has always believed strongly in the value of this kind of summer camp), now takes approaching 1000 children per annum. Despite the world being very different from that of 1980, and there being more challenging children around today, it is wonderful to see how the youngsters of 2009

still gain in so many ways. The opportunity to play together in a green and peaceful rural setting is not as common as it ought to be. ATE urges parents to “give your children back some real childhood.” We are regularly delighted and moved to see young people heave a sigh of relief after a day or two at an ATE holiday, realising they do not need to keep up an act or pretend they are more sophisticated and grown up than they are, and then throw themselves into just playing and having a great time together, as children should.

Fifty or so young people train as Monitors each year, and there are 25 people who have gone through all the stages and become Directors.

6. Get REAL / Do It 4 REAL.

The other attempt to raise the profile of summer camps has been the recent government “Get REAL” or “Do It 4 REAL” scheme. Set up as part of a farsighted initiative by David Miliband and Tessa Jowell in 2002/3, the scheme offered subsidies to encourage more parents to send children to summer camps. In 2003 the scheme was run by the DfES, and over 1000 children were recruited by a number of recruiting agents, notably Brathay Hall, and Connexions Devon and Cornwall. Half a dozen providers took part in the scheme, and youngsters were allocated to them by the recruiting agents. ATE was one of the providers, and took 100 children into its own 2003 programme. The money for all this came from the Big Lottery, and there was sadly an unhelpful difference of opinion as to whether they or the DfES should be running the scheme. On the principle of “He who pays the piper” the Big Lottery won this argument, and they managed the 2004 scheme, using the same providers but taking three times as many children. They were (understandably) mainly concerned to see that the children benefiting from their money ticked all the correct boxes, whereas the DfES had also been trying to give the whole idea of summer camps a longer term boost.

The 2004 scheme was nevertheless very successful, and several articles appeared in the press welcoming the higher profile being given to summer camps. There was also a piece on the BBC Six o’clock News, with interviews and film from some ATE holidays. The Big Lottery was looking to put the scheme onto a much larger basis for 2005 and 2006. They had indicated to ATE and the other providers that they should prepare for considerable growth. The Big Lottery then decided to seek a Lead Agency to oversee the growth of the holiday programme on their behalf. The 2003 - 2004 providers bid as a consortium, but in the end the contract was awarded to the Youth Hostels