

Truth about camping revealed

CLEARWATER LAKE, KLEENA KLEENE — Pure, unsullied truth being the hallmark of these columns, one hesitates to write about the glories of family camping. There is a temptation to talk about sunsets and fresh air. The passionate pursuit of truth demands some other things to be said about this old Canadian summer sport.

Not everything about camping is fun. To wit:

* the stink of gas.

Campers use gas for lanterns, stoves, outboard motors, electrical generators and, if they don't watch out, brushing their teeth in the early morning.

The gas-tight container has not yet been built. Significantly, the space shuttle disaster was caused by the familiar failure to seal joints. We can put man on the moon and make babies in test tubes, but so far, we can't stop a Jerry can from oozing gasoline or fumes. Some things are just too difficult, that's all.

Gas makes its way to sleeping bags, pots and pans, the tent and your hands. There is rarely enough to cause an explosion but there is always that infernal, eternal stink. They say pine trees and the Balm of Gilead stands give off a delightful odor. There are families who have camped in pine and cottonwood groves for decades and never smelled those scents, their nasal passages being permanently curdled with 89 octane unleaded.

* Speaking of outboards . . .

The outboard motor was developed more than half a century ago by Mr. Johnson in the United States but so far neither he nor anybody else has quite got it right. The best motors refuse to start at the dock; the worst quit when you are five miles from home at sunset.

They say no man can serve both God and pack horses. The same

WRY & GINGER



Paul
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goes for outboards.

From time to time somebody will sell you, rent you, loan you or perhaps give you an outboard motor while uttering these words: "She goes on the first pull."

If you can possibly get away with it, shoot that man and bury him at the crossroads with a white holly stick driven through his heart. We don't need people like him in this world. There is enough frustration, disappointment and general misery already.

* Toilets al fresco.

For almost about two million years, men just dodged over behind a bush when relieving their bowels. It is only in the last few hundred years that we introduced any cleanliness, order and comfort to the process.

Well, campers, if you want to regress two million years, go ahead. Most of us don't. We may be effete. It's certainly a word I plan to look up in the dictionary some day. But in simple language, most of us have developed a taste for porcelain, padded seats and magazine racks and we consider a pine cone a poor substitute for two-layer Delsey.

Most outdoorsy articles don't mention the subject but here we talk about truths.

* Rain.

Baden-Powell, who was good at tenting out, had nothing joyous to say about camping in the rain and neither has anybody else.

Small children refuse to play any of the clever rainy day games that mother packed. The adults quarrel about Mississauga Rules and other perversions of cribbage.

Incurable optimists, some of the most unbearable people to have around any camp, keep talking about Clearing Up Showers and Raining with a High Sky until they are hit with something hard and heavy.

The only thing worse than toughing out a rain in camp is trying to break camp in a rainstorm.

For reasons no one can explain an unexpected snowfall makes campers cheery, co-operative and friendly. Rain is different. They blame rain on each other.

* Fear of bears.

Bears themselves are usually no problem unless you poke them with sticks or steal food from their babies. As a threat to your health they rank somewhere between the Archbishop of Canterbury and Saddam Hussein.

Fear of bears is another matter. Fear of bears can devastate a camp. The children refuse to go outside at night to brush their teeth. They mistake squirrels for bears and make up horrifying stories about them.

Adults dismiss the children's stories as nonsense and tell ones of their own which are more absurd. After a few drinks, they start believing themselves.

By sundown, grownups are mistaking any old stump for any old bear and standing petrified with fear before it in the gathering dusk when all they need do, even with real bears, is hammer on a pot. Any clean pot made by a reputable manufacturer will do, people say.

But nothing, not even the thought of pot-hammering, helps if contagious fear of bears is raging in camp.