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TITLE=THIS IS AMERICA #1077 - Summer Camps

BYLINE=Jerilyn Watson

VOICE ONE:

More than nine-million American children are spending part of their summer at a camp. They are swimming, playing sports, making music or learning to use a computer. I'm Shirley Griffith.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Steve Ember. We tell about summer camps today on the VOA Special English program, THIS IS AMERICA.

((THEME))

VOICE ONE:

Traditional American summer camps offer children a chance to play many sports outdoors. These camps may be in the mountains, in the woods or at a lake. Other camps teach activities like painting, music or computer programming. Children at all kinds of camps meet new friends, learn new skills and develop independence.

Some children go to camp during the day and return home at night. Others stay at camp all day and all night. Most children who attend camp are between the ages of about six and sixteen.

Some children stay at an overnight camp for one or two weeks. Others stay for as many as eight weeks. Parents pay from one hundred to more than seven-hundred dollars a week for overnight camps.

VOICE TWO:

Children from poor families who live in a big city might not get the chance to go to a summer camp. The Fresh

Air Fund is a well-known organization that gives children in New York City that chance. People around the country give money to support the Fresh Air Fund. Each summer, it sends more than ten-thousand poor children from the city to stay with families in the country or to five camps in New York State.

Since Eighteen-Seventy-Seven, the Fresh Air Fund has helped almost two-million of

New York City's most needy children. These children do what they cannot do in the city: breathe fresh air, play on green grass and swim in a lake. Some children begin staying with the same family when they are very young and continue for a number of summers.

(MUSIC BRIDGE))

VOICE ONE: The American tradition of sending children to summer camp began more than one-hundred years ago. The first organized American camp probably was the Gunnery Camp. Frederick W. Gunn and his wife Abigail Gunn started it. They operated a school for boys in the state of Connecticut.

In Eighteen Sixty-One, Mister and Missus Gunn took their students on a two-week trip. They walked to the chosen area and set up camp. The students fished, hunted, and traveled by boat.

VOICE TWO:

Today, summer camps for children have become very important to millions of families. Many American women now work outside the home. Working parents need a place where their children can be cared for during the summer when they are not in school.

Camps help children, too. For most children, overnight camp is the only time during the year when they are away from their parents. Camp gives them a chance to feel that they are independent. Campers live together in cloth tents or in wood cabins. They eat their meals together in a large dining room.

Sometimes, however, the first time at summer camp can be difficult. Children might not like living with other campers. They might not like the food. Or, they might not like to do things like swim in a cold lake. Some new campers miss their parents very much.

VOICE ONE:

Mental health expert Chris Thurber studied almost three-hundred-thirty boy campers. The boys were between the ages of eight and sixteen. They were staying at an overnight camp. Eighty-three percent reported that they wished they were home at least one day during their time at camp.

The American Camping Association suggests that parents prepare children before sending them to camp. They say parents should let children help choose the camp. And they advise parents to discuss what the camp will be like and what campers will need to know. For example, parents can show their children how to use a flashlight to find a bathroom at night.

Experts say young children may feel better at camp if they bring a toy from home. And parents can write letters to their children often.

VOICE TWO:

Most young people have a good time at camp. Many return to the same camp every summer until they are old enough to have a job. Then they might return to the camp to work as a group leader for the younger children.

For example, a woman from the state of Illinois attended camp in nearby Wisconsin every summer for more than ten years. Then she became a group leader at the camp. Many years later her own children attended the same camp. Now she says that someday her grandchildren will go there, too.

((MUSIC BRIDGE))

VOICE ONE:

There are about nine-thousand camps in the United States. Most of them are overnight camps. There are camps for children with many kinds of interests. For example, a camp called Roughing It is in the San Francisco Bay area of California. It offers traditional activities for children and teenagers. Campers climb mountains, take long walks and ride horses. They play sports, swim and fish. Other camps offer just one main activity. Children can go to a camp where they play just one sport, like tennis, soccer, baseball or basketball. Young people who like the arts can spend the summer learning about art, music, dance, acting or writing.

VOICE TWO:

The best known camp for young artists is the Interlochen Arts Camp. It is part of the Interlochen Center for the Arts in the state of Michigan. Its music program is especially well known. More than two-thousand young people from the United States and forty other countries are attending the arts camp this summer.

Camps that offer programs in science and environmental studies are popular, too. For example, the United States Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama welcomes adults as well as children. Whole families can live together in a place like a real space station. They take part in activities similar to those carried out during real space shuttle flights.

VOICE ONE:

Another special camp is Seacamp in Big Pine Key, Florida. Teenage campers learn to dive under water using breathing equipment. They study the ocean environment.

Some older children like wilderness adventure camps. Campers take long trips by bicycle or canoe. They climb big rocks and explore caves.

Each year, an increasing number of children develop their knowledge of technology at computer camps. This summer, more than thirty-thousand young people are attending the top computer camps in the United States.

((MUSIC BRIDGE))

VOICE TWO:

The United States also has many camps for sick or disabled children. At these camps, children take part in traditional activities and receive special medical care. While the children are away, their parents get a rest.

Handi Kids in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, has a day camp for children and young adults with health problems. The campers have poor hearing or sight. But this does not stop them from enjoying water sports, arts, dance, music and other activities.

Perhaps the most famous camp for sick children is called the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in the state of Connecticut. It is for children with AIDS, cancer, and serious blood diseases. The famous actor Paul Newman started the first Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Nineteen-Eighty-Eight. Similar camps have been established in other parts of the United States, Ireland and France.

VOICE ONE:

For many children in overnight camps across the United States, the day ends in a traditional way. They gather around the campfire to cook and eat a sweet dessert food called "s'mores." The campers cook marshmallows over the fire. They put the marshmallows and a piece of chocolate between two graham crackers. This food got its name because after campers eat one, they ask for "some more," or s' more for short. As the fire dies, the campers join in singing traditional songs like this one.

((CUT ONE: THE WHEELS ON THE BUS – CDP-2820))

Chances are, the children will always remember the fun they had and the songs they sang in the firelight of summer camp.

((THEME))

VOICE TWO:

This program was written by Jerilyn Watson. It was produced by Caty Weaver. Our studio engineer was Keith Holmes. I'm Steve Ember.

VOICE ONE:

And I'm Shirley Griffith. Join us again next week for another report about life in the United States on the VOA Special English program, THIS IS AMERICA.

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