

Camp Hammer

Tree 'n Sea Living

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Sixth-graders learn a lot at Camp Hammer. But the teenage student



counselors who supervise them probably learn a lot more.

Camp Hammer is an outdoor education camp in the redwoods of the Santa Cruz Mountains, a program that has been operated by the county's Office of Education since 1955. During the spring and fall semesters, schools throughout the county send entire sixth grade classes to live for one week at the outdoor school where they learn about nature firsthand.

It's an intense learning experience for the children, one they long remember. And an even more intense learning experience for the high school students who accompany them as camp counselors. They learn what it's like to be supervisor, teaching aide, and surrogate parent to a group of energetic 11-year-olds.

Children at Camp Hammer this past week, where accompanying photos were taken, come from Natural Bridges and Aromas schools. Counselors are from Santa Cruz and Watsonville High Schools.

Every week for the 22 weeks the outdoor school is in operation, 12 volunteer counselors are recruited from various county high schools. These teenagers serve as an adjunct to the school's teaching staff. Each student counselor is assigned a group of 10 children.

"It was kind of a mind-blower for me, being responsible for that bunch of little kids for 24 hours a day," said one exhausted highschooler after the last bus of campers had departed Friday afternoon. "You really have to be on your toes. It's hard work. But I'm kind of sorry to see them go. I'll miss them."

For more on the outdoor school see next page.

*Photos by
Pete Amos*



Among teens serving as counselors at Camp Hammer are, in nature study photos top and left, Tim Schaeffer of SCHS and Monica Bronson of Watsonville High; Chris Allegretti (SCHS) center right, supervising kids in bunkhouse; Kevin Tara (SCHS) left, Susan Faitos (SCHS) above, and Monica Bronson, right.



Teen Counselors Learn Too at Outdoor School

By MARYLIN PAINTER

A whole week of riding herd on a cabinful of high-spirited 11-year-olds isn't an easy job. Especially if you're 17.

But you do learn a lot of things — about responsibility, for example. And what it means to be an adult.

"It's a big responsibility. The kids look up to you as an older person. They respect you," says camp counselor Susan Faitos, one of those 17-year-olds. "But you have to earn their respect. You have to watch yourself. You can't just act the way you do around your high school friends."

"Right," Christine Allegretti agrees. "You have to set a good example."

Both Susan and Chris are seniors at Santa Cruz High School and have spent the past week as student counselors at Camp Hammer, the outdoor education camp for sixth-graders located near Big Basin State Park in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Each week about 130 school children arrive at the outdoor resident school to study the plant and animal life of forest and stream. They are divided into cabin groups of about 10 each, each of which is assigned a counselor.

These counselors are volunteers from local high schools. They receive high school credit but no pay for their week-long stint. And they are with their young charges almost constantly — on the nature trails, at the pool, in the cabin and in the mess hall.

At the outdoor residence school, children study a variety of subjects: botany, meteorology, astronomy, and water safety, as well as math, language, and arts and crafts as they relate to nature. They

learn the identification of the plant, animal and insect life around them, and the interdependence of these biotic communities. Most of all, according to school director, Sister Mary Carolyn Becker, they learn to respect and protect our natural environment and resources. Also on the staff are five teacher naturalists.

Says Sister Carolyn, "We have a terrific teaching staff here. But they really couldn't do their job adequately without the help of our student counselors. They assist us not just in the teaching of the regular subjects, but in teaching the youngsters about the dynamics of group living. They vitalize the whole program."

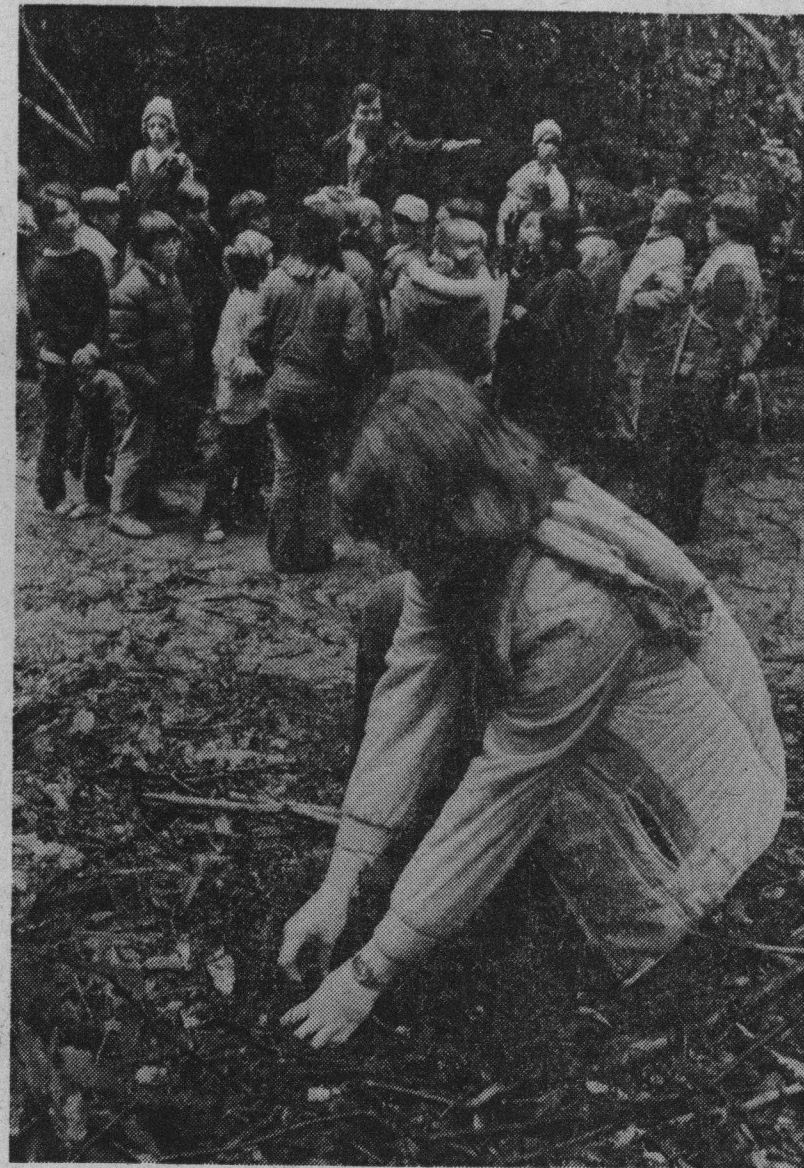
Work experience advisor William Waller at Santa Cruz High who recruits students to serve as counselors, comments: "We've sent about 150 kids to the camp from our high school during the past three semesters. We really believe in this program. The kids learn by doing. When they're in school they're in a subordinate role, but at camp there's a switch — there they're in a leadership role, a teacher kind of role, parents in absentia.

"It's a great learning experience for them. We've seen some amazing changes in some who have participated. And, you know, it takes some dedication on the part of the kids. Because it's not an easy job."

How do the counselors feel? What are some of the toughest problems they encounter?

"Getting my kids to take their showers," Linda Eisele of Santa Cruz High says. "I finally did succeed though."

"The hardest part is controlling the goof-offs," says Tim Schaefer, also of Santa Cruz High. "Once I really had to lay down the law."



"I found it hard not to play favorites. You might like a certain kid a lot, and then give her special assignments, like putting up the flag or something. But you've got to remember to treat them all equally," Susan comments.

"I think it's hardest to get them to go to sleep," Chris contends. "They're keyed up, they want to talk. You have to be firm. It's kind of hard. You maybe want to be like one of the gang, but you can't. You can be their friend, but you can't be on their level."

"Being a counselor really makes you more aware of how hard it is to be a teacher or a parent. You learn about con-

trol, how hard it is," says Susan.

Chris, who like Susan, has served as a counselor at Camp Hammer before, agrees: "I sort of know now what they have to go through. When I got back to school after my last time here, I saw my teachers in a different perspective. I had sympathy for them."

Another problem the counselors face is that they must make up all schoolwork they've missed during the week away.

"The teachers don't give you any special favors just because you're here at camp," Tim says. "You have to make up the tests and homework when you get back."

"But it's worth it," Linda says.

One thing the counselors learn is how to develop a feeling of esprit de corps within their own cabin groups and with the camp program as a whole. Apparently they succeed. Susan gives one example:

"At campfire on the last night some kids are called upon to stand up and say what they liked about the camp experience. One boy got up to say his piece and just broke down midway through it, and started to cry. And the amazing thing was that no one laughed at him or teased him. They all felt the same way."

"It's so easy to get at-

Bernice Watkins of Watsonville High School, one of the teen counselors at Camp Hammer this past week, takes a soil sample as part of her duties as aide. All of the counselors say they have learned a great deal. "Being a counselor really makes you more aware of how hard it is to be a teacher or parent," says one of them. "You learn about control, how hard it is. And the kids look up to you. You learn responsibility too."

tached," Christine says. "I cried a little myself when my last group left on the bus."

And says Susan, "Even though sometimes you think you never want to see another 11-year-old again, you do get to love them. They kind of idolize you. They look up to you, ask your opinion. They're all eager to know what junior high and high school are like. It's neat. Some counselors still get letters from kids they led five years ago.

"It's funny. I remember when I was a sixth grader myself at outdoor camp. All the counselors looked so old to me, like adults. And now we're the old ones — the adults."