VOLUNTEER FIELD AND CAMERA GROUPS IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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Last fall an effort was made to have the children of the Elementary School become better acquainted with the outdoor life in the Chicago area, and to secure their help in collecting specimens for the Museum and the vivaria in the Museum and the grade rooms. Hitherto, the collections had been made and the vivaria maintained almost exclusively by grown persons, and entirely without help from the students. However interesting the collections were, or the life-histories grown and preserved, or the forms in the various vivaria, the interest shown in them by the students and friends of the school was so small as to be very discouraging.

The effort was begun by announcing in morning exercises that a field trip would be made to some place the next Saturday morning and that the students were invited; and this announcement was made weekly, while the weather permitted, during the school year.

About seventy children and four mothers took part in these volunteer field trips. Most of them went more than once, and several were very regular. But this does not, by any means, represent all who helped, after it was seen that a great many interesting things were being brought in. No estimate can be made of the number of students who took interest in the vivaria, brought in specimens, cared for them, asked questions, but who could not go on the excursions because of parental objections, swimming- or music-lessons, or other Saturday morning engagements. There was also difficulty in having the trips properly announced as to time, place, and cost, as was shown by the frequent misunderstandings and disappointments. The number of volunteers ranged from three to seventeen each Saturday.

EXAMINING A SPECIMEN

Photo. by Botsford Young, Seventh School Year

OUTDOOR DRAMATICS—THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

Photos. by Dorothy Beman, Ninth School Year

IN JACKSON PARK

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It is impossible to describe these trips in detail. They were usually made to some point on a stream or pond, and as much in the woods as possible, and at a low cost for transportation. The material was collected in Mason jars, pails, lunch boxes, etc., and placed in the aquaria and cages on the return to the building. The material consisted of many plant and animal forms, both aquatic and terrestrial: bats, lizards, snakes, turtles, fish, frogs (their eggs and tadpoles), salamanders, crawfish, fairy shrimp, mussels, snails, and many forms of land and aquatic insects and their larvae. They saw on these trips several of the larger mammals and birds in their natural habitats: woodchucks and their holes, chipmunks, squirrels, muskrats and their villages covering acres of the marshes, and nearly all the birds common to this area, and several of their nests, eggs, young, and care of the young. Considerable attention was given to physiographic features, such as dunes, beaches, ravines, streams, lakes, lagoons, the work of the waves, running water, and ice, and a great deal of attention was given to climate and the weather. There was a tendency toward specialization on the part of several of the volunteers—a few studying birds almost wholly, and some, insects or flowers; while others preferred to explore the ponds and streams.

The interest of the children in the forms found was far beyond expectation. They simply ran over each other in their eagerness to see and learn about them. It was not necessary to create interest, and everything was done in the most beautifully sincere manner. After going out into the woods and calling attention to a few things, or asking a few questions, or without saying anything, the main thing was to answer questions or listen to them. To appreciate the situation, it would be necessary for one to see them exploring some of the ponds and streams and woods visited. Photographs can do the scenes no justice at all. The sincerely inquisitive manner in which they entered upon the quest must be seen to be appreciated. The success in these quests was always surprising; nothing seemed to escape them. If the work had been simply to collect, they probably would have done as much as an equal number of grown people, or even better.

The co-operation in bringing in animals and caring for them, and the almost fellow-human sympathy, solicitation, and consideration bestowed upon them by the children, were a source of satisfaction and delight to every one who had the privilege of seeing them. Many of the students made regular daily observations, and kept themselves well informed concerning the growth and habits of the various forms. Some observed pretty generally, while others studied only one or a few things, as, for instance, the doves, snails, or the development of larvae. They saw in the vivaria corner a good many of Nature's operations—from the human-like care which the doves give their young to the horrible, relentless, merciless process of a snake's swallowing a live frog; and they displayed many emotions—from the wildest, unbounded joy in the good and beautiful to fearful indignation at the rapacity of the snake and pity and tears for the frog.

During the first few weeks, considerable difficulty was experienced in restraining the students, both elementary and high school, from disturbing the animals in the vivaria. It was not altogether through mischief that they handled them, but often through affection or desire to experiment. They became so annoying at one time that we were on the verge of reducing the number of animals to those that could be kept under cover. The situation was discussed with the students who were bringing in and caring for the material, and each one agreed to make every effort possible to prevent the necessity of doing this by watching the vivaria and speaking to or reporting everybody who wrongly handled any of the forms, or disturbed things in any way. For many days everyone who was seen to be observing in the corner was asked to enlist in this work. Everyone was assured that he had a responsibility in the matter, and that it was not sufficient for one to refrain from disturbing the animals himself, but that he should restrain others, also. There were several who readily agreed, and others who were not decided, while still others freely argued that as long as they kept hands off no responsibility was attached to them. So there were many opportunities for discussing with them in terms of things immediately concerning all of us a very vexing moral question—a question

EXPLORING A STREAM

WHEN THE MOTHERS WENT; OR, LUNCH HOUR

which appears to branch out into a good many relations. The discussions nearly always turned to one's duty when he knows of graft or other violations of the law in business, labor, or politics. For instance, if one should see another student chasing a young alligator or frog around the aquarium with a stick which would probably result in the death of the animal and therefore deprive those who captured it and others of the satisfaction and pleasure of observing it, and took no part in it himself, he was under no obligation to restrain the student or report his conduct. When the covering was torn from a pipe in the hall of the school building, making an unsightly condition, a boy acknowledged he knew who did it, but did not feel it to be his duty to disclose the perpetrator's names. The majority of a group of high-school boys saw no reason why they should call a contractor to account for placing flimsy material in a building and thereby making it dangerous, unless they expected to inhabit or use the building themselves. The discussions which brought out these points usually came about through somebody's being caught in the act or reported as disturbing the arrangements in the vivaria. However unsocial some of the views were, the questions were given surprisingly serious consideration throughout. The matter must have been gone over with more than a hundred students, individually and collectively, and, although it required a great deal of time, the results amply repaid us in the good to the vivaria, and in getting into touch with the ideas of the students and in securing their sympathy for the work. Although the Museum was without an attendant for hours at a time during the last two months of the year, and many students came and went—there were always from one to twenty-five—nothing was seriously disturbed.

The last was the climax to the volunteer field trips. Three mothers and eight children went, and it was the best of the year in the exploration of the stream and woods, and all of them apparently enjoyed it immensely. It would help the field work immeasurably if one or more of the parents would go on each trip, and in most cases they would enjoy it as much as the children.

The elementary school had the greater number of interested field-workers, but the number probably would have been only a very little greater had the same invitation been extended to the students of the high school. It is to be regretted that exact data were not kept showing how many high-school students took part, but a considerable number did. A few of them, with the permission of their dean, spent their study hours in the Museum and gave effective help in keeping order and protecting the animals. Several useful additions to the vivaria and preserved specimens were made by high-school pupils, and during the recess periods they visited the Museum in nearly as large numbers as the elementary pupils, and were apparently fully as deeply interested. It was impossible to observe any lines drawn between grades in this work—where the elementary ended and the high-school began.

In connection with the field club, and working hand in hand with it, there was a photography group, and several pupils belonged to both. In this work the enthusiasm was all that could be desired and considerable good work was done. From the time we started to the photography room till the last print was put in to wash there was a high state of tension. They appeared to be on edge in this more than in anything else. Although a few of them had great difficulty and accomplished very little, it was found at the end of the session that they were far from being discouraged. Several did extra work, so far as they could be accommodated, and a few went to great trouble to equip outfits for continuing it in their homes or wherever they expected to spend the summer. It would be hard to find anything which brings out the native resources of a student so much as an interest in photography.

While the group was for the most part mainly engaged in learning the technique of developing and printing, it made several interesting photographic records of field trips, social affairs, and other events in the school life. A good many records of the handwork, and changes in the garden and on the grounds and in the parks from winter to summer, were made. The children made lantern-slides of these records and showed them to the whole school in the morning exercises.

Through means of the vivaria, field trips, and especially the camera work, there was a limited opportunity for putting to practical test the theory that the common branches, reading, writing, etc., may be taught well, when there is need for them, to help in giving expression to ideas or work about which, in the opinion of the student, the community should know. On two occasions when we were to show lantern-slides in the morning exercises, boys handed in papers indicating what they were to say. The spelling and composition in two of the papers were especially bad. The boys were told that the papers must be improved before being read to others. In the one case, it was written twice, and in the other, three times, with great improvement each time. The last ones were passable, and as the time was short they were allowed to use them. It appeared from the eagerness and persistency with which these boys worked on their papers that a great force could be brought to bear on them could motives of this kind be kept before them. They were interested in and knew something which they were legitimately sure the other members of the school wanted to hear.