Within sight of Scouter on instant nature trail are half a dozen specimens, including salamander in milk carton.

By DAVID A. WOLFTHAL
Explorer Advisor
Post 750
Greater New York Councils

INSTANT NATURE TRAIL

ALL THE NATURE TRAILS I had seen or read about were permanent installations built in camps or parks by professional naturalists, requiring weeks, even months, of work. When a friend "volunteered" me to build a nature trail for a district Scoutmaster's showando, I decided something far less elaborate would be more practical.

Most troop camping is done a day or two at a time at different places. The Scoutmaster has only an hour or so to set up a trail. After it gives his Scouts some fun and quick learning, he wants to take it down with a minimum of disturbance to the natural surroundings. What he wants is an instant nature trail!

Here's one I demonstrated to Scoutmasters at the showando and have since improved—without complicating it. All age groups can use it.

I take 100 feet or so of 1/8-inch rope out to an interesting section of woods and tie one end to a tree. Wandering through the woods, wherever I notice a worthwhile nature specimen, I tie the rope and make a descriptive sign. Generally a suitable section averages a sign every 15 feet.

Using a clipboard as a "desk," I print the signs on 5 x 8-inch cards with colored magic marker pens whose ink dries instantly and is waterproof. I hang each sign on the rope with four paper clips, two slipped over the rope and two more linked to them and slipped over the card.

All you need to set up the trail—besides a little nature knowledge—are the rope, cards, pens, and paper clips. Of course you can "jazz" it up a bit.

For example, take a plastic box—such as wood screws are sold in—and enclose a live insect, snail, or salamander. Fasten it to the rope with a string or transparent adhesive tape. Release the critter when done with it.

Another teaching device is a beginner's nature book hung on the rope. A marker is placed on the page that refers to a nearby specimen.

To mark small specimens, say a strawberry plant, tie a string from the rope to a stake by the plant.

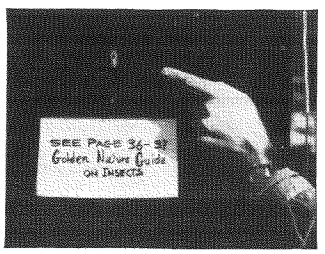
For far-off specimens such as a bird's nest in a tree, drive a pole into the ground with a cross pole lashed to it pointing to the nest.

You can teach related information, too. Hang a compass from the rope with a card asking which direction the trail is going at that point.

Instead of a general nature trail you may set up one that concentrates on trees, edible plants, or rocks.

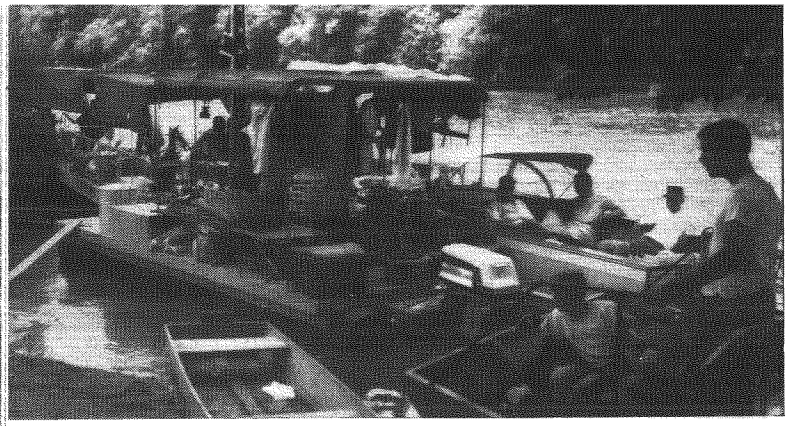
While your Scouts are going over the trail, make up another set of signs, each one asking a question about what the related original sign taught. Later let the boys follow the quiz trail, jotting down their answers on a note pad.

Once the Scouts get the idea, you can let the patrols take turns setting up an instant nature trail—while you relax in camp with an instant cup of coffee.



Cicada shell stapled to wall with card containing reference to popular nature guide.

Card directs Scouts to look at tiny bud specimen through optical lens hung on string.



A half dozen Explorers and a leader ride amid this orderly confusion aboard one of the flotilla rafts tied up here for siesta to a bank of the Tar River.

INCREDIBLE FLOTILLA

By RICHARD AUGER

Field Director, East Carolina Council

BUILDING A RAFT

SIZE. An 8'x16' raft carries a crew of 7 safely but uncomfortably; 2 sections bolted together lengthwise carry 14 safely and comfortably. Width of 8' meets highway regulations for transportation.

FRAME. Sets of 4 2x6s 16' long on edge. Cross at 2' intervals with 8 2x4s 8' long. Fasten with heavy spikes or bolts.

DECK. Cover with ½" exterior plywood.

FLOATS. For 16' section use 10 55-gallon steel drums. Place in 2 rows just under sides of raft. Nestle snugly between 2x6s. Fasten each drum with 3 strips of banding steel (used for crating). On 2 front drums weld sheet metal nose cones.

RAILS. Make of 2x4s and rope or of ½" pipe.

AWNING. Cover half or more of deck with awning and drop sides.

STORAGE. Put boxes or containers amidship to keep food and bedding dry.

STEERING. Mount wheel amidship with cables to motor.

POWER. At least 18 HP outboard motor for 16' raft; 35 HP for 32' raft. Carry 20 gallons of gas and small auxiliary motor. Consult outboard dealer for type of propeller.

WE CALLED OUR EXPLORER ADVENTURE the Incredible Flotilla because so few people believed it would ever be launched. When 115 Huck Finns embarked on 17 outboard-motored rafts on North Carolina's Tar River after months of planning and building, "incredible" still expressed our amazement. When the flotilla beached three days and 150 miles down river on the coast, the Incredible Flotilla had become famous under that name.

District Commissioner George Bailey and I set out to find a superactivity that would shock the council's Explorers and potential Explorers into realizing the possibilities of the Exploring program. The idea of river rafting came from a story in BOYS' LIFE magazine.

While I negotiated official approval, George investigated raft designs. With the advice of a naval architect, he began to figure sizes, materials, steel-drum displacements, and costs. The council Explorer cabinet at its annual planning meeting in the fall "bought" the superactivity with enthusiasm and went to work on it.

Meanwhile, George had built a raft for a trial run. We hauled it out to Silver Lake one sunny January day. If it floated, we would name it "Explorer 11"; if not, we would name it "Bailey's Folly" with no one the wiser, Captain Bailey drove back through the middle of town with all pennants flying on "Explorer 11."

The first of six information and pep bulletins went out, this one containing instructions for building rafts. F-Day was announced as June 6, right after school closing.

By mid-March, 25 posts were planning rafts. Post memberships increased. Some inactive posts revived. The council Explorer cabinet assumed new prestige. The council executive board anticipated progress reports.

Posts known to be building rafts received offers of drums and other materials. Many frustrated adult Huck Finns wanted to help with the construction.

Our bulletins stressed that Explorers rather than adults should shoulder the building and cruising responsibilities. Explorers were to be elected as captains of rafts, as squadron commanders for every four rafts, and as admiral for the entire flotilla.

Only one of the original 25 posts dropped out of the cruise because of no adult supervision, but we lost seven more from schools that continued in session after F-Day to make up for days closed during bad winter weather. To postpone the cruise would have eliminated many other crews scheduled for summer jobs.

As F-Day approached, phone calls for unexpected information came from parents, Advisors, radio and TV stations. WNCT-TV, for instance, wanted to know the exact hour we would go under the bridge at Greenville.

Embarkation on F-1 was at Old Sparta, one-time river port. Luckily most of the rafts arrived on flatbed trucks that could back into the water. Some were on boat trailers. A few were just man-handled into the river by about 40 Explorers.

Most rafters spent the day in final preparations and inspections. Some made short runs with parents and

friends aboard—that secretly satisfied many of them of the rafts' safety.

One raft superstructure contained all the comforts of home including, literally, the kitchen sink. The boys built it that way, despite adult warnings of overweight. No, the "Titanic," as it was named, did not sink, but luckily a post committeeman brought along extra drums that were strapped in place.

When a crew declared itself ready for inspection, a health and safety committeeman would go aboard with a check sheet for a shakedown run. All crewmen had to be swimmers and have life jackets or belts. If everything checked out safely, he held a commissioning ceremony that went something like this:

After asking names of the captain and Advisor and the number of crew members, the inspector would scoop up a cupful of Tar River water and say, "Captain, by the authority of the East Carolina Council, Boy Scouts of America, I now christen this raft the 'Stumpjumper.' May all hands have a happy and safe voyage." Loud cheers from all crews and friends!

That night at a captains' meeting, squadron commanders and the admiral were elected. Positions in the flotilla, according to the order of registration of rafts at the council office, were announced.

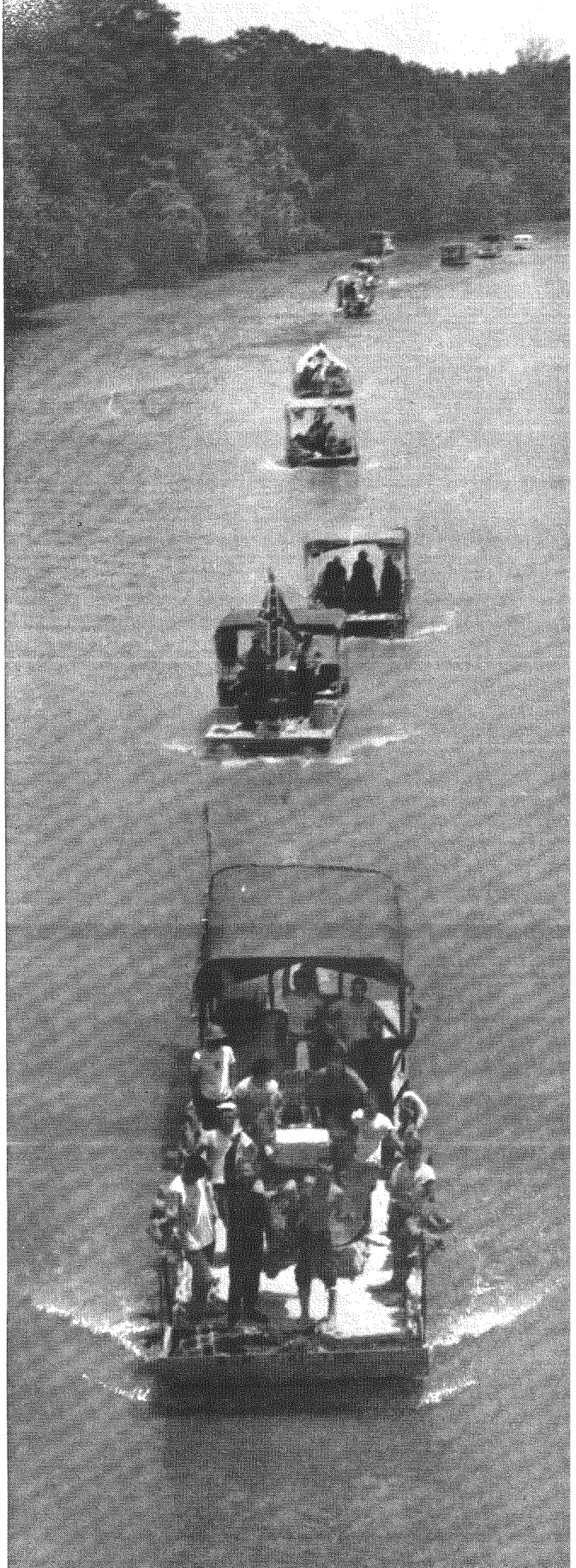
F-Day at last! The carbine cannon announced F-Hour at 4:30 A.M. Motors sputtered and hummed as the rafts pulled amidstream behind the flagship "Kon Tiki." Not a single motor failure marred the start. Besides the four rafts mentioned, the line included the "Morehead of Swim," "Leftover," "Decoy," "Amagori," "Hogfish," "Humper," "Herringbone," "Z-Stacker," "Duke Bait," "Friendship 56," "Boo-Boo," "Wanderer," and "Little Lee." After a half hour of travel, the crew in the power skiff reported to the admiral that all was well.

The program committee had arranged for a feed and dance by the Little Washington Kiwanis Club on the first night; a noon lunch by the Greenville Moose Club; a fish fry at Hobucken; and docking, showers, and hoists onto trucks at the cruise end in Morehead City.

Of course, we did not have a trip without troubles. Four rafts were always behind. One had a lot of motor trouble. But along the way we were greeted like celebrities, and people seemed to enjoy going out of their way to help us. The gang was worn out at the end of the cruise but with undimmed enthusiasm, no complaints, and one question: Where do we go next year?

What impressed me most was the discipline and good will maintained throughout the cruise by the Explorers and leaders. That was the only feature of the Incredible Flotilla that was not incredible.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Just before going to press, we received a bulletin about the second Incredible Flotilla. The 1963 version, June 3-9, will go down Albemarle Sound and skirt Pamlico Sound, making the inner circle of North Carolina's Outer Banks, totaling 185 miles. Two hundred and fifty Explorers and leaders will be aboard 25 rafts, seven Sea Explorer boats, and five outboard motorboats.*



Four squadrons of the flotilla chug down river toward you and Pamlico Sound—and how would you like to be one of the crew?

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NEW PRINTED AIDS

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THE SCOUT CAMPOREE GUIDE, *No. 3701, 80 cents.* Completely revised, this pamphlet brings up to date the planning and administering of a council or district camporee.

PIONEERING PRINCIPLES, *No. 3573, $1.75.* The author of this book, John Thurman, is Camp Chief of Gilwell Park, the British Scouts training center. From his world-wide experience, Thurman helps leaders use pioneering activities in a practical way.

ROUNDTABLE HELPS 1963-64, *No. 3863, 40 cents.* Annual guidebook, geared to ensuing program quarterlies, is for assistant district commissioners in charge of roundtables and other related to planning these programs for Cub Scout, Boy Scout, and Explorer leaders.

PACK PROGRAM PLANNING CHART, *No. 6463, 4 cents.* Annual work sheet for leaders in planning programs from September, 1963, through August, 1964.

TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING CHART, *No. 6563, 4 cents.* Annual work sheet for leaders in planning programs from September, 1963, through August, 1964.

DEN RECORD SHEET, *No. 4218A, 1 cent.* Major revision of this 8½ x 11 roster and advancement record provides space for adding names of new members.

EXPLORER EMBLEM DECAL, *No. 3481A, 10 cents.* Now in six colors and smaller in size, 4 inches square.

RELIGIOUS THEME APPRECIATION PLAQUE, *No. 3809, 60 cents.* Laminated plaque, 6¼ x 9¼, features the colorful 1963 religious program cover picture. It makes ideal presentation for religious groups to present to Scouters or for Scout groups to give to religious leaders.

RELIGION IN LIFE AWARD POSTER, *No. 4524, $1.25.* Colorful 13 x 19 poster of new award for Boy Scouts and Explorers who are Unitarian Universalists.

WORLD BROTHERHOOD PICTURE, *No. 3800, $15.00.* Full-color reproduction of Norman Rockwell's 1963 calendar picture, 20 x 23½, framed in wood.

LETTERHEAD WITH UNIVERSAL EMBLEM, *No. 4563, $1.50 per 100.* Trefoil or official universal emblem of B.S.A. replaces First Class Scout badge in upper left corner.

LETTERHEAD WITH UNIVERSAL EMBLEM AND ROPE DESIGN, *No. 4578, $1.50 per 100.* Official universal emblem and square knot replaces First Class Scout badge at top center.

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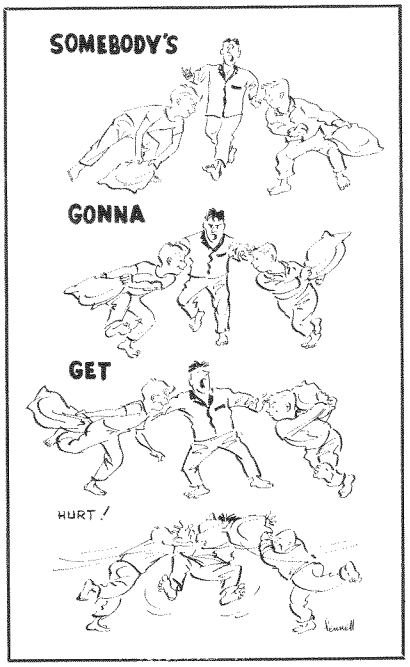
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