

YOUTH HOSTELS

Two Contributions to an Important Problem

I.—Opening the World to Youth

By DOROTHY M. ALLEN

In this day and age of social and economic insecurity, war scares, political strife, religious difficulties, it is so easy for us to dwell on these disturbing forces and forget those elements that are a power in building a happier world. Youth hosteling is one of these.

What could better establish a happy state of mind than to pack a light knapsack, and in rough hiking clothes, to start off on the youth hostel trail; meeting other hikers and bikers; enjoying the enchantment of the out-of-doors; stopping at a hostel in the evening 10 or 15 miles away; preparing supper in light-hearted camaraderie and with many an exchange of stories of the day's experiences; singing and folk dancing; and then to bed, or rather to "bunk", where a healthy weariness brings dreamless sleep.

Youth Hostels are inexpensive lodges where those who are travelling by foot, bike, canoe, horseback, ski (in other words in any way as long as it is under their own steam) may stay overnight for 25c. There is adequate supervision with a housefather and housemother in charge. The hostel has separate sleeping quarters, washing and toilet facilities, for boys and girls and is usually equipped with double decker wooden bunks, straw mattresses and blankets. There is a common kitchen where the hostellers can prepare their own meals and a common recreation room where they gather for an evening of song, folk dancing and gay chatter. The houseparents greet the hosteler who presents his Pass (a membership card which costs \$2.00 a year for those over 21 and \$1.00 for those under 21) and

registers in the hostel book. Hostellers respect the hostel customs formed by the youth themselves and uniform in all hostels of the world. These are based on the needs of hostel living and consideration of the group. A spartan regime of self service, early bed hours, an early start, simple food, and no smoking and drinking, is essential for a full enjoyment of hosteling.

The idea of youth hosteling is not new. It dates back to the time of the cave man, who felt the urge to see what was beyond his front door. That spirit of adventure has prevailed down through centuries and today we still have young people and old, keen for adventure, wondering what is over the hill.

The need for youth hosteling has been felt through many generations and has come mainly from this urge to get out and see the world, or "wanderlust" as the German language expresses it, and from the need for a healthy, natural outdoor exercise which will bring one "back to nature." People have written about it, talked about it and even tried it themselves, but until 1910 no one was able to extend the benefits of such a life widely to other people. In that year Richard Shirmann, a school teacher, in Altena, Germany, originated the youth hostel idea and proved that it is possible in a very simple way to enjoy the advantages of travel and to gain the benefits of rugged living in the out-of-doors.

Richard Shirmann was so interested in the boys whom he taught that he wanted to get them away from the four walls and paved streets of the cities, into the open air, where exercise in the sun and wind gave them healthy bodies and where their lessons, interpreted through their trips, became much more

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interesting and more vital. Soon the teacher longed to extend the trips, but he needed economical stopping places where they could spend the night, where blankets would be provided and cooking facilities available. At first he used his school house attic for a starting point, but outgrowing that, was able to obtain the use of the Castle in Altena. This Castle became the first youth hostel and Richard Shirmann and his wife the first housefather and housemother. Since then there have been registered in Castle Altena over a million overnights, represented by all nationalities from all over the world. His idea spread over Germany and, according to his plan, hostels were set up about 15 miles apart in chains and loops. Finally, he was able to interest the Government in the idea and it became a part of the school curriculum for all boys and girls to go youth hosteling with their teachers for one day each month and for three weeks at the end of their High School course.

After the war, France, Belgium, Holland, Norway, England and other countries caught the spirit of youth hosteling, and today there are 4500 youth hostels in 20 countries of the world, with a yearly overnight registration of 8 million. In many of the European countries the heads of the Governments endorse youth hosteling and, as in Germany, require that boys and girls youth hostel as part of their school program.

An International Youth Hostels Conference is held each year in one of the countries where youth hostels exist, and delegates, who are usually leading educators, come from the different countries to discuss youth hostel problems and ways and means of facilitating travel for young people from one country to another, and to develop uniformly advantageous ideas. Suggestions for hostels, equipment, publications are exchanged. The Conference decides upon one international stamp so that house-parents in all youth hostel countries, although they cannot read the language, will recognize the youth hostel pass.

Hosteling came to the United States in 1933 when a young married couple

Isabel and Monroe Smith were invited to attend the International Conference in Germany, after having biked through the European countries, visited many youth hostels and with many of the youth hostel leaders. They returned to America with just one thought in mind, that of establishing hostels in America. They saw the plan for hostels not as another organization in competition with already existing organizations, but rather as a facility for the use and benefit of all organizations, so that thousands of American young people who had previously known only a confined city life could experience at first hand the beauties and healing benefits of nature. The first hostel was opened in Northfield in 1934 and at the end of the fiscal year, October, 1937, there was a membership of 7166, overnight registration of 15,181 and 110 hostels. Hostels already established include a loop of over 70 in the New England States as well as smaller loops in California, Pennsylvania, Michigan and New York. Graduates of the National Training Course, held at National Headquarters in Northfield once a year, are in the field now extending those loops as well as setting up new loops in some of the other States—Washington, Colorado, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Illinois. The country is divided into 8 regions and the Field Worker in each one spreads the idea of hosteling by speaking and showing hostel movies to school and college groups, service and church clubs; and by setting up loops with hostels 15 miles apart.

Last summer an experiment was successfully tried of linking the East and West by a Rolling Youth Hostel—a hostel on wheels in the form of a pullman car fitted with separate sleeping quarters and a common kitchen—which was sidetracked at interesting places to enable the hostellers to travel by bike. Their bikes accompanied them in the baggage car free of charge. Their itinerary took them from Northfield to Montreal, across Canada to Calgary and Vancouver, down into California and back across the United States through Colorado, New Mexico, etc. They traveled about 9,000 miles

by train and 1,000 by bike, visiting the hostels in California and Michigan and the Canadian hostels in Calgary.

Another project of the American Youth Hostels is hosteling in Europe. Sponsored groups are limited to 10 people in each, and under competent leadership travel every summer through European countries. It is also possible to hostel on one's own, simply procuring a pass and general advice from National Headquarters. Last year 1901 Americans hosted in Europe, 250 under AYH sponsorship.

Youth hosteling came to Canada in 1933 when a small group of persons in Calgary, Alberta, began to study what was being done in the way of exchange students throughout the world. This investigation was prompted by the project of a local travel company to carry out a trip for high school students to Europe at greatly reduced rates, and the research led to interesting discoveries concerning the activities of School Journeys in England, Youth Hostels all over Europe, the Experiment in International Living started in a New England University, the practice of exchanging students between British and German schools, and also brought to light information about travel scholarships offered by different organizations in America and in Europe. This led to a desire to have youth hostels in Alberta and the first was opened at a little summer resort in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains about 30 miles from Calgary. However, there was no financial backing save the very small surplus from limited private incomes and the West was not hiking minded—the distances are great and the population small. The group persisted in their efforts and in spite of much opposition and hardship were finally able to establish a chain of 10 hostels through the foothills and into the mountains to Banff, the well known Rocky Mountain resort. The trails are as yet too rough for cycles and it is necessary to hostel on foot or on horseback. The hostels are varied and include log cabins on farms and ranches, an Indian school, Indian teepees, private homes and the Y.W.C.A. at Banff.

The management of the association is in the hands of an Executive Committee at Calgary. At its first annual banquet held in March, 1937, Mr. Monroe Smith, National Director of the American Youth Hostels was present and showed movies and told of hosteling in the United States and Europe. At his suggestion, it was arranged that the AYH would help the Canadian Youth Hostels Association to ensure close and friendly development across Canada by establishing a temporary National office at the AYH headquarters with a representative from Canada to study youth hosteling and the National office set-up. One of the members of the Executive Committee in Calgary came to Northfield in May, 1937 and now, in April, 1938, after a very interesting and instructive year including two months of hosteling in Europe, is ready to return and develop the work in Canada. She plans a demonstration loop near Niagara Falls in Ontario which next year will be linked up with the AYH chains when hostels are established in northern New York State. Hostels in Quebec will be linked with the New England loop in Vermont and New Hampshire. On the West Coast, negotiations are already under way for a loop connecting by boat, Port Angeles and Anacortes in Washington with Victoria and Sidney on Vancouver Island. This will no doubt be the first Canadian-American link. When hostels are established in Montana, they will go through Glacier Park, over the Border to Waterton Lakes and through the Foothills of the Canadian Rockies to join the already established chain of 12 hostels from Calgary to Banff, then on up to Jasper Park in the north.

The Canadian Youth Hostels Association now has a Federal charter and is prepared to extend activities across the Dominion. They were admitted to membership in the International Youth Hostels Association as the twentieth member at its Conference in Paris last fall, so that members of the CYH on presentation of their membership card may stay at any of the 4500 youth hostels throughout the world.

Youth hostelting is a healthy way of living. Youngsters who have spent all their lives in the city learn what it really is to be healthy after a summer of living on simple food, regular sleep and plenty of fresh air and outdoor exercise. They also learn how to live economically on a very small allowance—\$1 a day is the youth hostel budget. They learn to live cooperatively through their association with other people in the group and in their contact with other hostelers and the houseparents. There are many stories of how hostelers and houseparents have been mutually benefited.

Youth hostelting teaches the city boy to appreciate the fact that all he has comes from the country. He sees the grain fields and the animals in the pastures

and traces their products to his food and clothing. In the same way, the country lad has an opportunity to visit the city to see art and hear good plays and music.

Youth hostelting has spread very rapidly over the United States. Why should it not do likewise in Canada? It has had a start in the West, but conditions are not as favorable there as they are in the East where there are wonderful possibilities and a real need for youth hostelting. Why should Canadian boys and girls not have the same opportunity as the American boys and girls to get out and see their own country and to broaden their outlook so that they may become better citizens of their own country and of the world?

II.—A Plea for Youth Hostels for Nova Scotia

By IAN F. MACKINNON

“COME on, boys, and pitch off a load while you’re resting”—was the encouraging cry of an enthusiastic Musquodoboit farmer of the old school, so it is said, when his summer group of amateur hay-makers from the city stood perspiring by the side of the lofty hay wain they had brought in to the barn from the fields.

Can Nova Scotians of to-day respond to the challenge of a holiday programme of real vigour? With such strenuous recreation as the hay-field, many a now successful Nova Scotian in other parts of the Dominion has formerly employed his holiday time; and the question now is raised for us, would the programme which the Youth Hostel Movement is designed to serve—a programme which calls young folk out of the automobile and the lounge, and away from the street corner and the pool-room—appeal to young Nova Scotians of the present decade? In this degenerate day of “knee-action” cars, power-boats and com-

fortable modern hotels, are there stalwarts willing to shoulder their packs or mount their cycles, and set out to see our province as it can only really be seen, on foot? And could suitable accommodation, clean and inexpensive, be assured them in lodges established along the bracing shores of our province or among its upland farm homes? These are some of the points that seem to be involved in projecting a Youth Hostel Movement for Nova Scotia.

Hiking, cycling, skiing the soft red sand or clay roads winding among the elms of the upper Stewiacke valley or of the East River St. Marys’, in this rich month of June, leading off at either side into shady wood paths; the wide expanse of crescent shaped white sands above many a beach on which the blue seas break in August, sands that are bounded farther away by head lands sometimes capped with grey sea-mist; the hard-woods of the Cobequid hills or of the Cape Breton highlands in September; and the same landscape later in the year buried deep in snow and