



VI. PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Well-thought-out programs and activities are instrumental in making the Camp Charlie experience enjoyable to all participants. Knowing *how* things need to happen to create a comfortable and inspiring learning environment is just as important as planning *what* will happen.

The Programs and Activities Committee will:

1. Determine programs, activities and special events to carry out the theme and mood of the weekend.
2. Determine schedule and logistics.

Determine Programs and Activities

Keeping the purpose of each day in mind as you plan the content of your activities will help ensure a consistent, cohesive and successful program.

Friday — Make Them Feel Comfortable

Friday's activities focus on welcoming and orienting families and making them feel a part of the whole experience. The tone for the entire weekend is set on Friday, and participants need to feel that they have arrived at a safe, organized, fun, and exciting event. Be sure to include some discussion on the significance of the area you will be exploring over the weekend.

Saturday — Experience the Outdoors

Saturday is when the bulk of activities take place, and you will need to plan a variety of offerings and locate appropriate instructors who are knowledgeable about the outdoors and your theme activity. Teach, share, facilitate, demonstrate, entertain, assist and inspire so that everyone enjoys a memorable experience. Make it fun to learn and fun to be outdoors!



Volunteers, mentors, and instructors should encourage conservation stewardship by weaving personal stories, tips, and experiences into conversations throughout the weekend. At the Okefenokee, Art Webster takes a moment to share his experiences that led him to the Okefenokee. It was also emphasized that a conservation ethic can be carried into any career choice, and is in no way limited to only those who work directly with our natural resources.

Questions to consider:

- Will activities entice families to try camping again on their own?
- Do program options accommodate varied interests and ages within camping families?
- Are there minimum age requirements for any activities?
- Although we want families to stay together, are there any activities that necessitate having to split up (example: cooking class).

Sunday — The Take-Home Message

Sunday morning will be busy with breakfast, breaking down camp, and a final gathering. Use this time to talk about the highlights of the weekend, and how families can continue to experience nature on their own. Leave them with tangible ways to get outdoors and serve as stewards of their natural world.

Determine the Schedule and Logistics

A lot of forethought goes into making a Camp Charlie weekend fun and effective. Keep in mind that you are setting the schedule for a diversity of ages, physical abilities and interests. If you are having a specific-themed camp, you can eliminate some of these issues by being very clear to your target audience. For example, if your activities focus on fishing, or involve strenuous hikes, make that clear in your registration materials. Hopefully, this will keep families from signing up for something that they really have no interest in, or cannot physically handle.

If your weekend has a very general camping or wildlife theme, your schedule will need to accommodate a variety of interests, ages, and personalities. You'll have some that like to get up early, and others that are late-risers; some families with little ones that move at a slower pace, and others with teenagers that get bored very quickly. As a general rule, go for a well-balanced weekend. Every individual may not enjoy everything that is planned, but, hopefully, something will "click". And don't be afraid of down-time. Sometimes, it is this free-time that gives campers the opportunity to find their own connection with the outdoors.

As you sort through the logistics for activities and programs, think through the following questions:



Okefenokee focused solely on getting campers acquainted with the outdoors, and experiencing the wonders of the Okefenokee Swamp. As time allowed, other activities, such as fishing and bird walks, were offered. Partnering with Okefenokee Adventures and the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge were keys to being able to offer quality experiences.

- Is it best to divide into smaller groups for certain activities?
- Does the schedule have a good balance between organized activities and free time?
- What is the backup plan for inclement weather?
- Do you have all of the necessary supplies for activities?
- Do you need to make site visits to adequately gauge the feasibility of the activities schedule?
- How many volunteers will you need for each activity?
- Do campers need to sign up for any optional activities ahead of time? If yes, make sure this information is in the registration materials.
- Do you have qualified instructors?
- Is there enough time to get campers from one activity to another?
- Are all of your programs onsite, or do you need to provide transportation to and from any activities?
- Does the activities schedule flow well with the meal schedule.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

This sample schedule will give you a good idea of the flow for a typical Camp Charlie weekend.

FRIDAY

4:00-6:00pm Registration and Check-in

A smooth and organized registration will help create a positive environment and a great beginning. Emphasize the need to arrive in time to set up camp before dark. Make sure campers participate in the setup of their campsite. As you work, use these natural teaching moments to provide any personal tips that have made your family camping adventures successful and enjoyable.

6:30pm Dinner

Because there is a lot to get done to set up camp, it is best to have volunteers prepare Friday dinner and serve buffet style at the meeting area. There will be better opportunities in the weekend to get campers involved in the cooking process. Try to arrange seating so that mentors can sit with their families.

7:45- 9:30pm Opening Program

Allow at least a half an hour for families to get settled after dinner. Your

AT THE OKEFENOKEE

FRIDAY

- 4pm Registration
- 6pm Group dinner
- 8pm Opening
Ice breakers
- 9pm Campfire songs
Skit
S'mores
history of the area
- 10pm Lights out

SATURDAY

- 7am Breakfast
- 8 am Travel to Refuge
- 8:15am Walk through
Longleaf Pine
- 9:45am Canoe the Swamp
- 1:15pm Lunch
- 1:45 Free Time at
Visitors Center
- 2:30pm Pond Study
Chesser Homestead
- 5pm Return to
campground
- 6:30pm Group Dinner
- 9pm Campfire songs
Local Storyteller
Skit

SUNDAY

- 7:00am Optional fishing
or bird watching
- 8am Breakfast
- 9:30am Breakdown
- 10:30 Wrap-up:
Surveys
Charades
Certificates

opening program will set the tone for the whole weekend and result in everyone feeling comfortable. Realize that families will need time to relax and prepare for the weekend. Don't try to fit too much in — keep it simple. The following format provides a good guideline:

Welcome and Introduction

Spend no more than 30 minutes giving a basic introduction, orientation and overview. Plant the seeds of good stewardship and remember that what you tell them now will define their expectations. Even though participants will have received mailings to prepare them for the weekend, a good introduction and orientation will assure that everyone's expectations are met. Besides, you can never reiterate enough when it comes to coordinating large groups of people. Make sure campers know the itinerary for the next day.

Get-acquainted time

Have everyone participate in an ice-breaker with the whole group. This will alleviate tension and put people at ease.

Evening Program

While there won't be enough time for a full blown evening program, it is still important as it introduces the flavor of the weekend. Remember that people may be tired and need a good night's rest, so don't run too late. A little bit of entertainment will help break any tension or apprehension that may be left. Some examples are campfires, storytelling, and singing. This is also a good time to present an inspirational message to set the tone of environmental responsibility, and to discuss the natural and cultural history of the site. Don't forget to include important announcements. For those who want to stay up a little later, you may opt to set out cards and board games. Be sure campers are aware of campground quiet hours. If Saturday's activity schedule allows, you might want to provide a grab-and-go breakfast option for those campers who are "night owls" and prefer to get a little later start Saturday morning.

SATURDAY

7:00am Optional Early Morning Activity

A bird walk or hike gives early risers a great outlet. Be sure to have coffee available for those who need it — it makes a big difference!

8:00am Breakfast



Evening programs at the Okefenokee entertained campers while teaching them about local history and folklore.

9:00-11:30am Session 1

Depending on the size of your group, you may want to plan two concurrent activities. This will allow you to work with smaller groups and it gives your participants a choice based on their interests and ages of family members. Some examples of activities are fishing, hiking, nature photography, and watchable wildlife. We encourage you to use the first portion of this time for interactive instruction and the later part of the morning as time for the participants to try out their new skills. Make sure parents and children participate together. This is a time for families to learn new skills together that they can share after the weekend is over. Provide a break and always keep lots of drinking water around. Remember to use partners, staff and volunteers as instructors. This will allow the mentors to spend this time with their families, sharing the experiences and helping them.

12:00pm Lunch

If part of your camp's focus is to teach basic camping skills, lunch might be a good opportunity to have families and mentors prepare food at their campsite as a follow up to a morning cooking class.

1:00-3:30pm Session 2

4:00-6:00pm Electives

Elective sessions provide participants with a broader range of choices. The scheduling and length of classes will depend on your staff and the available teaching opportunities. Be sure to have families register for electives prior to camp so you can plan accordingly. Encourage families to stay together, but if they choose to split up, make sure at least one parent accompanies each child.

Clearly explain the meeting place for each class, or have a common meeting spot for all classes. Classes need to offer variety, both in content and in style. Try to offer some that are active or hands on, as well as some that are slower paced. Instructors should be prepared to teach children and adults together.

Some families will want to participate in electives, while others may be interested in taking part of the afternoon to do something on their own, or just rest. Be aware of the differing needs of participants. *Remember the goal of the program — to connect families to the outdoors. Be sure to give individuals an opportunity to figure what that means for them. Often, it is the unstructured time outdoors that can be the most impactful.*



Young campers at the Okefenokee enjoy the Longleaf Pine forest.

6:30pm Dinner

Consider inviting sponsors and donors to join the group!

8:00pm Campfire

The Saturday campfire is a rewarding culmination of a long day of learning and another opportunity to develop the stewardship focus. Consider recruiting a local folk singer, guitarist, or storyteller. Other ideas include a demonstration of Native American dance, a program on bats, a story related to conservation, or the telling of local lore.

9:30pm Optional Late Evening Activity
(night hike, owl prowling, star gazing)**SUNDAY****7:00 Optional Early Morning Activity****8:00 Breakfast**

Make announcements concerning the location and time of the morning's activities. Reiterate that everyone should stay through the closing ceremony.

9:00 Breakdown Camp

Make sure equipment is inventoried as each campsite is broken down. Family members should participate — these moments are important in increasing the family's confidence to camp on their own in the future.

10:30 Closing Ceremony

It is very important to bring closure to the weekend and recognize those people who have played an important part. This includes: the coordinators, the main sponsors, the instructors, the mentors, and especially the participants. The coordinators may want to recognize the sponsors, instructors and mentors, and then let the mentors each recognize their families. You may also want to discuss upcoming opportunities for families to implement conservation ethics in their own home and community. It's also a good time to tell a few stories and leave everyone with a warm, personal feeling. You might want to present plaques to your main partners or sponsors, gifts to your staff and mentors, and certificates and/or a gift to the participants. Be sure to have participants complete a survey before they leave.

11:30 Departure