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"Keeping Our Beaches Bare"

Old enough to make a lanyard, and to do it nude

By Kate Zernike

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Lutz, Florida

On the third-to-last day of summer camp, the temperature has risen to 98 degrees, and even the troopers have begun to whine.

"I don't want to play strip volleyball!" complained Jane Jeffries, 13, her sunburned shoulders sagging. "I want to play regular volleyball." Halie Nelson, 14, agreed, "Yeah, I'd rather get all the clothes off, and keep all the clothes off."

Here at the Youth Leadership Camp run by the American Association for Nude Recreation, the dress code for regular volleyball – and for the pudding toss, mini-golf and campfire sing-alongs – is the same as it is for skinny dipping.

Basking in what nudist organizations say is a growing interest in nude recreation, the association has begun a nationwide expansion of summer camps for nudists age 11 to 18. The first began here 10 years ago, in a county north of Tampa known for its concentration of nudist resorts. In 2000, the association opened its second camp in Arizona. A third is to open outside Richmond, Va., this month, and organizers in Texas are planning a fourth camp there for the summer of 2005.

Naked summer camp might strike non-nudists as illegal or prurient, or like striking a match to the gasoline of

adolescent hormones.

Anti-nudity statutes in Florida and other states, however, say that nudity on private property is perfectly legal, even among minors, as long as there is no lewdness. And camp rules, drawn up by campers themselves a few years ago, guard against that. "Do not allow nudity and lust to mingle," they state. "No improper touch. Nudity must not be humiliating, degrading or promote ridicule." Even the occasional clothing, worn in the camp's shuttle van, must not be "sexually alluring."

Nude tourism has grown to a \$400 million business this year from a \$120 million business in 1992, reports the

nudist association, with travel agencies noting a surge in nude cruises and, in May, the first nude charter flight. The association itself is growing, with 30 new clubs, for a total of 267, in the last two years. There are still few places, however, for teenagers.

"I've spent my life around nudist resorts; this is the first time I've ever been around kids my own age," said Halie, who had been named Camper of the Day the previous night for participating fully despite a foot swollen by a bee sting. "It's either 45 and over or 10 and under."

The campers, many of them alumni of church or scout camps, say they



NUDE FAMILY VALUES

Looking for a healthy escape, many parents join nudist camps. But are they any place for kids?

THE BARE FACTS

- A nudist camp is a place where people of all ages and backgrounds can enjoy nude recreation.
- The American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR) is the largest nudist organization in the U.S.A.
- AANR has over 267 chapters in 30 states and 10 countries.
- AANR camps are open to all ages and backgrounds.
- AANR camps are safe and secure.
- AANR camps are fun and exciting.

In its June 30 issue, TIME magazine carried a feature story on AANR's youth camps.



like this better, but not for the reasons most people might expect. Suzanne DeChillo/The New York Times Jane Jeffries, 13, who says she prefers nude volleyball to strip volleyball, preparing to camp out at the Lake Como Resort in Land O'Lakes, Fla. Skinny dipping, of course, members of the Youth Leadership Camp, run by the American Association for Nude Recreation, in Land O'Lakes, Fla.

"I learned to play tennis this morning," Amanda Williamson, 18, said. "I never did that at church camp. I'm getting better at volleyball, too."

Aside from the obvious, naked camp looks a lot like other camps: campers play Capture the Flag, catch frogs and leap up when the whistle blows signaling seconds for ice cream. They make s'mores and sing modified campfire songs ("This Land Is Your Land" ends, "This land was made nude and free.") Each camp team writes a song for the annual talent show, with hosts "Sunny and Bare."

Parents and campers say the camp promotes a healthy body image at an age when confidence can crumble, and better relations between the sexes when awkwardness normally prevails.

"In gym class, some of the girls will hide in their lockers to take off their shirts in front of other girls," Halie said. "Sometimes I'll say, 'Why are you so insecure?' They all say, 'I need to lose a few pounds.' I just don't care about that stuff. I accept my body the way it is."

The nudist association, the larger of two nationwide, sees this as a place to train "youth ambassadors" to what nudists call the "textile" world. (To the question posed by one after-dinner discussion, "I'm a Nudist; Am I a Nut?," the answer, not surprisingly, was no.)

There are things that set this camp apart. Mosquito bites are more irritating, the sunscreen police more vigilant. Campers pack lighter, but

drag towels, Linus-like, because nudist etiquette dictates using one when sitting. And the discussion groups feature topics like "Is God Mad at Me Because I'm a Nudist?" (Again, no.)

And everyone is on guard against COG's – "creepy outside guys" – who try to sneak in past the tall fences and security gates, to peek. On Tuesday, when a suspicious-looking man arrived at the pool, counselors quickly herded campers away and guards escorted the unwelcome visitor from the premises.

"It makes me a bit freaked out that people would think of nudity as a sexual thing," said Michelle Jones, 15, a camper from Texas.

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Pat Brown, president of the American Association for Nude Recreation, said the camps run extensive background and criminal checks on counselors, often college students who have been nude campers themselves.

Bernie McCabe, the state attorney for Pasco County, where the Lutz camp is, said he had never heard any complaints about it.

Parents seem to have no worries about pedophilia, speaking of nudist camps and resorts as safe, family-like environments. "Everybody keeps an eye on the children," George Jeffries, Jane's father, said. "There are no transgressions by regular folks coming here, and newcomers are watched very closely." Still, even parents who have sent their children here for several years do not necessarily tell their church friends or relatives about it.

"If I'm confronted I will not lie, but it's not something I want to have to explain," the father of two boys, an engineer for a telecommunications company, said. "I worry about my kids being ostracized. I believe in this, but a lot of people don't."

The father, like others, said the camp discourages some of the less attractive behavior of adolescents: "I don't have to worry about them sneaking around and seeing things their friends are, the girlie magazines and the porn movies."

Campers agree.

"It takes the mystery out of what the other person looks like, so sex becomes more something you know you're waiting to experience, rather than just a physical thing where you want to find out," said an 18-year-old who gave her name as Jeanene.

"At school, if you see a person, you just see their clothes," Jane said. "Here you have to actually get to know the people."

But some things about teenagers, nudist or not, remain true. Boys at 13 still find scatological humor far funnier than anyone else does. Eleven-year-old girls still fight about who gets to dance as J. Lo in the talent show. Even nudist campers coo at the "cute" swimsuits as they pull on clothing to get back in the van. Pulling out of one resort during a field trip, a few campers ask the van driver to stop so they can check out the souvenirs. Inside, they finger sarongs and embroidered T-shirts. But they don't buy.

Too expensive.

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