

SWAMP STOMPERS, A FIELD COURSE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL¹

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ABSTRACT

Swamp Stomping is an interdisciplinary (biology, geology and ecology) field course for high school students. The emphasis on field work is two-pronged—for future natural scientists to begin procedures inherent in field work and, secondly, to develop in all Swamp Stompers an appreciation of and concern for their natural resources so that as an electorate they will be better informed on the wise utilization of Ohio's natural resources.

The junior and senior high school field course in north central Ohio referred to as the Swamp Stompers has for five years been developing the procedure of an optional weekend field course to offset textbook-centered natural science courses. The young people have been most enthusiastic in their acceptance of a Saturday field course which provides for them a first-hand contact with natural science.

In reality, the course began as Saturday field work in geology, discussed by George F. Linn, Huron County Schools, and biology, presented by Earl J. Cranston, of the New London Schools. However, student questions and interest soon changed the course primarily to something bigger than either of these fields, ecology.

Swamp Stompers is an organization without officers, but composed of many members, most of whom try for the blazer patch that is the distinction of a senior Swamp Stomper. The patch is the reward that follows attendance on spring and fall field trips and the acceptance of a five-thousand-word paper based on individual research in some field of natural science. Senior Swamp Stompers assist greatly by helping other students learn the techniques of collection, identification, and woodlore.

A Swamp Stomper trip is set up by inviting teachers of general science, earth science, or biology, or any other interested teachers or lay persons from a school district to accompany a trip and to bring four or five students selected by their science teacher. Thus, a ratio of one adult to five students is maintained and questions may be quickly answered by a senior Stomper or by referral to the appropriate adult. Transportation is by private car, the adults doing the driving. Field trip routes are those shown in the field guide or in the field trip section of the *Manual for Swamp Stompers*.

The field trips start at 8 AM and are generally held on every Saturday in October and May, and on other Saturdays in September and April depending on the weather. Students and teachers, usually representing four or five of the participating schools (New London Local, Western Reserve Local, South Central Local, Monroeville Local, Berlin Heights Local, Firelands Local, and Norwalk City), arrive at a designated spot from which that Saturday's field trip departs. All field trips are listed in the manual (*Manual for Swamp Stompers*, printed by Huron County Schools, Norwalk, Ohio; available at cost), and lie within an area covered by nine north-central Ohio counties (Huron, Erie, Ottawa, Seneca, Sandusky, Crawford, Richland, Ashland, and Lorain); stops are marked on a map in the manual to facilitate their location on any particular trip. New trips are now being created which extend beyond the original area and include different types of trips, such as walking trips on Kelly's Island and long distance trips to famous natural sites.

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Each field trip generally has four or five scheduled stops, one-half to one hour in length, together with occasional brief unscheduled stops of particular immediate interest, such as a soaring eagle overhead or a small stream in flood. Each stop is primarily selected to demonstrate some aspect of biology, geology, or ecology; individual collecting or investigation by the students is encouraged. Comparison of observations at the different stops on the same trip, or of other trips, plus answers to students' questions, leads naturally into ecological understandings.

There is no area, or group of areas, that can not be used to demonstrate natural phenomena and that can not encourage individual students' investigation.

Swamp Stomping is not a formal course in any school district; there are no examinations, no grades, and no regular school credits. Swamp Stomping is only the sharing in the field of the meaning and interrelation of natural history, as may be seen in north-central Ohio, by students, teachers, and local people, all interested in observing and understanding nature. A benefit of the program is that the field experience for the student need not be limited to one exposure in a school career, as is often the case, but may develop from continued "stomping" over a six-year period, the teen years when, as we all know, the urge to understand the outdoors is the greatest in students.

Swamp Stompers have demonstrated, through "field work our scientific birthright" (Keller, 1963), that young people are truly interested in learning about the natural world around them and that, through this program, they not only enrich their own lives by increased knowledge and understanding, but gain much that will make them a more comprehensive adult and voting citizen, one who appreciates nature and natural resources as functioning parts of science, conservation, and human endeavor.

REFERENCE

- Keller, W. D. 1963. Fieldwork: Our scientific birthright. *J. Geol. Educ.* 11(4): 119-123.
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