



How to Organize A Summer Camp for the OPRC

By Betsy Burnett, President, The Piedmont Chapter, OPRC

This document is for those who have always wanted to organize a summer camp but felt awed by the very thought! Here's how!! The Piedmont chapter in Virginia has organized a camp for the past three years and I am more than happy to pass on all suggestions for starting such a venture. You didn't know you could have so much fun and learn so much.

The first part of this paper addresses the organizational aspects of camp, and the second part is comprised of suggestions and ideas from other presidents who have similar activities.

We cannot say enough good things about hosting a summer camp for your chapter. It boosts camaraderie, creates friendships, gives riders new goals, and provides a fun summer adventure for everyone to look forward to. And summer camp may even boost membership numbers. Many chapter members report that one of the reasons they join OPRC each year is to attend camp!

We hope you will consider hosting a camp in your neck of the woods. Feel free to contact me, Betsy Burnett, or any of us on the board of directors if you have any questions.

The basic facts of The Piedmont:

Date	Fri through Mon 6-9 June 2008
How many	24 riders plus some spouses
Where	Penmerryl Farm, near Staunton VA
Instructors	3
Discipline	English. Flat work, cross- country and show jumping
Activities	swimming, tennis, fishing, hacking out, Sat. night party
Housing	On site with breakfast
Stabling	On site
Approx cost	\$400 includes six hours of lessons in various disciplines, room, breakfast, stall, bedding, and use of all facilities on site.

The Facilities:

The Piedmont has been very lucky to have the cooperation of the owners of Penmerryl Farm, a lovely facility between Lexington and Staunton, VA. The on-site facilities include 10 double rooms and two cabins that sleep six apiece. There is also a large dining/meeting room. All of this is located around a swimming pool with a gazebo and grill. The barn includes 24 12x14 stalls and an attached indoor arena. Outside there are two sand rings with jumps and a large dressage arena. The cross-country course is a five-minute hack. As to trails, there are a limited number of trails mostly surrounding two small lakes. The terrain is open and wooded. Turn out is very limited. Husbands and older children often accompany their wives and enjoy the outdoor activities afforded by close proximity to the George Washington National Forest and the Blue Ridge Mountains.

The Program:

The Piedmont program is strictly event oriented. Virtually all our members ride one or more of these disciplines so the instruction is based on their interests. Members arrive on Fri. evening to settle themselves and their horses. Sat. and Sun. are given over to intense instruction. Many stay Sun. night in order to enjoy the trails or other facilities offered by Penmerryl. Each day each member is given an hour of instruction in dressage, cross-country and show jumping totaling three hours in all. Gymnastic jumping is also included. The rest of the time is given to horse management and extra-curricular activities such as napping! It's a fairly intense program and, coupled with summer heat, can be exhausting. I haven't, however, heard more than a few soft moans! We are given breakfast by the owners and we arrange the dinners ourselves, usually a barbeque or two. There are restaurants in Lexington and Staunton but riders are generally too tired to travel. This is the time to get to know our members and, what with good food and wine, the purpose is achieved.

The Organization:

The Piedmont starts organizing camp about the first of Jan. The owners of Penmerryl are contacted and the dates set. Any issues of the past year are addressed at this time and both parties work out any problems. Between the middle of Jan and the middle of Feb, our instructors are contacted and any changes to the program are made at that time. We have used the same excellent instructors for the past three years and see no reason to change at the moment. They are all highly qualified within our area of interest.

A form is sent out to each member requesting they complete the following information:

1. Arrival time,
2. How many nights,
3. Their roommate,
4. What they will bring regarding food.

A questionnaire is included asking members what their goals are for the weekend and for the year; what they've been working on and if they felt successful; what problems have they encountered, physical or otherwise; how high are they jumping. They must all sign a farm release and send a copy of a current Coggins. With the deposit of \$100, they are assured a spot. Their final total includes bed and breakfast, stall, instruction, party, and the Penmerryl facility fee that we all pay. The chapter provides drink during the lessons and poolside. Full refund is available until 1 May. In due course, a tentative events schedule is sent out. This includes lesson times, warnings about "Barn Witches", how the meals will work, the extra activities to be enjoyed, driving directions, stable equipment to bring, and any other specific information. The lesson groups are not set at this time but done later by the President.

Groups of no more than five riders are organized by the President. This can be difficult as many of our members are starting green horses so the rating levels are not always applicable. Keeping the groups small ensures that each member receives individual attention during each day in each discipline. Admittedly, three hours can be a challenge for green horses but riders are encouraged to adjust as they see fit.

Each morning the riding schedule is posted on a big board. Also listed are special events and a list of those who have "evening stables" – people to check on the horse's welfare and to make sure they have adequate hay and water. In actuality, most check on

their own animals as the stables are very close to the rooms. The President also assigns certain people to play "Barn Witches". They are to see that the aisles are clear of all but properly bound hay bales, that horses are properly cared for after riding, that they have water etc, and that the aisles are swept and tack put neatly away. There is a brief tack safety inspection on Sat. at the beginning of the lesson.

The Goals:

The Piedmont has always believed in safety first with a challenge. Having qualified instructors to "push" a bit and have you accomplish more than you thought you could is an important goal for this chapter. If we achieve these two things, we feel we've done our job. Our mission statement reads, "To sponsor safe horsemanship through continuing education thereby increasing confidence".

Things that didn't work:

The Piedmont has tried giving out articles to read and discuss and games to play. We have tried lectures. At the end of the day, we found that members were too tired to care about such things and really wanted to sit down, have a drink, and talk to each other. This is a mini vacation for most and they appreciate being given the time to relax and be together. Less work for "mother"!!! Lectures and horse knowledge games (in Pony Club known as Knowdowns or Quizzes) are now reserved for other meetings. We may have one or two members in the chapter that don't "horsekeep" so lectures on stable management are not as necessary as they might be in other chapters. We've all been "shoveling it" for most of our lives!!

Last year we took turns videoing the lessons to show at a later time. This turned out to be a major organizational headache. If we could afford it, we'd hire someone to do it but that can't happen this year. We did have one person put his fabulous still photos on a CD to sell to members. This was a terrific souvenir of a great weekend.

Alternative ideas for camp:

If facilities such as the above mentioned are not available in your area (and we realize these are VERY hard to come by) we suggest that you consider "Day Camp". This is more easily achieved and cheaper too! You could also consider bringing in RV's or tents to house the members providing the facility has multiple paddocks or stalls. The Equinuts chapter in Oregon does this and has a ball. Here are just some guidelines for getting started as well as a few activity ideas:

1. Find an instructional facility that is willing to give two days to your members. This could be an already existing educational facility or someone's farm where the instructors come in each day.
2. The horses can stay there or go home at night.
3. The necessary equipment can be rented or hauled in if need be.
4. Various mounted lessons can be offered according to the members' ratings/skills, horse's abilities, and interests of the riders.
5. Mounted games which teach a lot about balance and control whilst having fun

6. Un-mounted demonstrations and hands on clinics such as natural horsemanship or lungeing
7. Mini polo matches
8. All western disciplines
9. Horse knowledge games and lectures to break up the day are some of the ideas you could include.
10. Evening barbeques and prize giving is always appreciated.
11. Get a photographer/videographer to come in and take photos/videos. These are wonderful instructional tools for long winter months. If need be, members can take turns videoing lessons.

I'm sure you can come up with a number of other terrific suggestions. Keep in mind that whatever you do, you need to start now, be organized, be willing to make mistakes, and to be fast on your feet! The end result of a lot of hard work will be happy members who have not only had a great deal of fun, but have learned to ride better. This is the goal of all chapters: education.

If anyone who reads this paper and is interested in starting a camp needs help, please contact Betsy Burnett at ebburnett@earthlink.net. I will try to help you organize a camp and, therefore, have a wonderful time. It can seem a bit daunting in the beginning but if you break it down into sections, get some help, and have your instructors blessing, it will be great fun and a highlight of your year. Indeed, it may increase your membership as it has ours.