

Personally Speaking

CHICKEN A LA ASPEN

Have you ever eaten a chicken "emu"? It's wonderful. At the appointed hour you dig down into a furnace-hot pit and pull out a meal of chickens and accompanying vegetables roasted fit for a king. But it's a tricky business, and you have to know what you're doing.

I know a couple of dozen former Scouts who will never forget one emu. It was the last day of a camping trip in the High Sierra. We hated to break camp, and had just agreed that if we had the makings of one more good meal we would stay another day; there was a 12,000 foot peak looming over us that we wanted to climb before heading for home. No sooner had we said the word than our wish was most unexpectedly granted, in the form of a huckster on his way with a truckload of produce to supply the far back fishing camps. We immediately bought the makings for a big chicken dinner that would be our farewell feast.

We decided to cook it "emu" style, to free us for the day's climbing. We dug a pit, built a good fire and heated the rocks that would bake our dinner. We put a thick layer of leaves on top of the white-hot rocks, then the chickens, carrots, yams, and potatoes, then another layer of leaves and a piece of canvas to keep out the dirt which we piled on to seal the pit. Now we were free for the day while the feast was cooking.

The few supplies left in our grub box made a mighty skimpy fare on the mountain climb, but we were buoyed up by thoughts of the waiting feast. Back in camp at dusk, everyone grabbed his plate and stood in an expectant ring while the cooks opened the pit and brought up the food. What a sight it was — those four big, beautifully roasted chickens surrounded by heaps of steaming vegetables!

But never was there a greater surprise in store! Half a dozen starved Scouts took big bites at the same moment, and half a dozen big mouthfuls came exploding out seconds later. Tentative tastes by the rest of us told us the sad story — every morsel of that beautiful array might. as well have been soaked in quinine as steamed in those leaves. We were the victims of our own ignorance. We had used leaves from the quaking aspen, a stranger to us, and hadn't known enough to taste them to see if they were sweet or bitter.

I expect there are easier ways to learn the tricks of camping, but one thing is sure - when you've made a mistake like that you don't make it again. No amount of "book learning" or talk or smooth demonstration in a Troop meeting can take the place of such real experience. That's why it's so important to get out of the meeting room into the open, to test each new-learned skill under real life conditions.

I hope a lot of your Troop or Explorer program is carried on out there. It's where Scouting was meant to be done.



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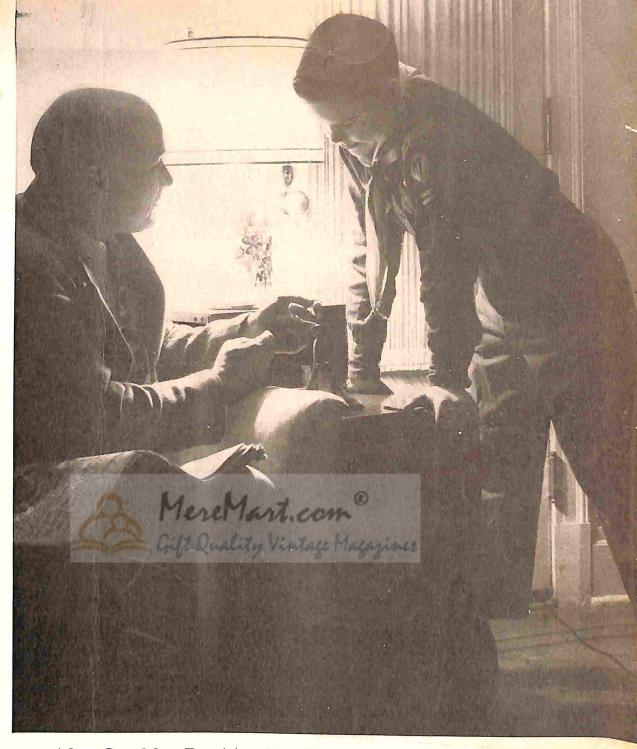
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OUR COVER PICTURE

. . . shows Charles Wager and Cub Scout Charles of Port Washington, N. Y. "Be explaining something to your son," said photographer John Champlin. "Great," exclaimed young Charles, "I wanted dad to show me how to fix this lamp." — and we got a picture.



NOVEMBER

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