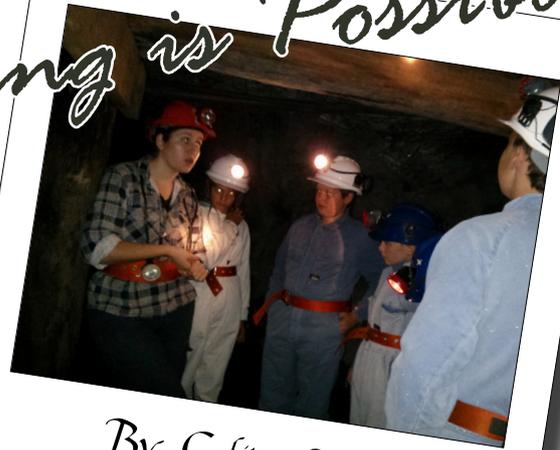




Anything is Possible



By Colita Scott

How to Run Your Next Home Ed Camp or Excursion

Home education camps and events are all about giving your children an experience to remember. For me, the best parts of school were the school camps and excursions. A lot of home educated kids feel the same way.

Too many new home educating families ask me 'so what's available for my children?' Well, the Home Education Network is not a school; there is no principal and no paid teachers, so organising events and camps is up to members. If you want something to be available, go ahead and organise it – it is not up to someone else to organise activities for your children. Firstly, ask yourself what interests your children; think about where their ideal camp or excursion would be and how it would run. Your kids will have a great time sharing these experiences with others, so the next step is to look at how you can make such a camp or excursion affordable and available to other home-educated kids too. I have been organising the snow camp and other activities for 13 years now, so I know a few tricks of the trade.

School rates

The key to getting a good rate for accommodation and entrance fees is to identify yourself as a 'school group'. I know this is the opposite to what I have said above, but the outside world understands the school model and many venues have the best rates for school groups. In educating our children, we are entitled to access educational prices so presenting yourself as a school representative when making an enquiry is reasonable.

Camp guidelines

HEN has a set of camp guidelines available for camp organisers and a separate set for camp attendees. Be sure to check out both, as the organiser's guidelines may assist you; also, ensuring all participants have a copy of the attendees' guidelines may help the camp run smoothly and ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities.

Making bookings

Put yourself out there as the principal. You are the front

man, so put on a good show and really emphasise that you are making a school booking, as that is what venues understand. When asked for your school name, say the Home Education Network. Note that you must be a current HEN member in order to make a booking under HEN's name. Avoid preaching about home education; the person you are dealing with is probably not interested and they will put you in the weirdo box if you harp on about home education uninvited. If they notice the kids at the end of the camp or excursion and ask questions about home education, then talk about it then, but not before.

Emphasise that our 'school' has high parental involvement and that you will need to get a good price for additional teachers. On top of a good teacher rate ask for a free teacher ticket for every eight students. This is common practice for school excursions and camps. As an organiser it is okay for you to go for free – it's a big job organising camps. Then use any extra free tickets to help with any extra costs. Don't share this discount around unless there is lots of cash left at the end of the camp. I have been caught out of pocket a few times on extra costs so this extra free ticket helps prevent that.

Make sure you find out any information that may influence attendance, such as minimum and maximum numbers and age requirements. If the venue has a lower age limit, make sure you circulate this information when advertising the event.

Taking bookings

Keep a record of names, contact details, number of family members attending and payment information as people book in. Send them any information they will need together with the link to the 'HEN Guidelines for Campers' on HEN's website.

Accommodation

It pays to keep accommodation all in one place. Over the years I have organised snow camps with between 30 and 100 people. One year, camp attendees were spread over four lodges. That was a nightmare to organise and it didn't

work for the kids because they missed out on the games. After a hard day on the slopes there is an even harder night of play – card games, cops and robbers, murder in the dark.

Try not to share the lodges/facilities with non-home-ed families or schools. They hate the wild free will of home education and the noise of loud play. So, if you are short on numbers, ask home-ed families to invite like-minded families to join in. This works.

Food

I always carry extra food in my pockets, as some families never feed their kids enough (I don't use money out of the kitty for this, this is my own personal thing.) Catering at snow camp has eased the need to feed hungry kids, as they tend to eat well before they leave the lodge to ski, but if kids get cold on the other side of the mountain, a muesli bar goes a long way. Remember to check whether you have any children in your group with allergies which you need to be aware of.

Catering versus self-catering

Catering can make camp so much easier as people can just attend without the worry of planning and packing food. For the snow camp catering works well as families do not have to lug food up the mountain. They can ski all day without having to cook. There are the families that hate catering, mostly for dietary reasons or dislike of conventional food, and cost can be a factor also. Personally I think the benefits outweigh the complaints, so I just listen and nod, but whether to cater or allow families to self-cater at your camp is up to you.

Organising camps does involve lots of listening and nodding. People have different needs and nothing suits everyone. However, most things can be resolved with patience.

Hooking new families up

Home ed camps are for the whole family. Some families, including the adults, can take a while to break into a group. Socialising at camps is just as important for the adults; they like to talk about their home education problems and concerns and to hear other people's stories. I have left many a camp with sore stomach muscles from laughing. Encourage families out of their rooms; some like to hide and it is such a shame.

Wild children and unresponsive parents

Breakages, violent actions towards other kids, uncooperative play, noise levels after 10pm – these are all things that can happen and you would think parents would deal with such problems. Most of the time, yes, but not always. This is where you, as organiser, step in. Everything that happens on camp comes back to you. First talks to parents but, if they don't act, you have a right to step in there and fix things.

Payments

Full payment a month before camp is ideal, but definitely insist on full payment before camp begins, otherwise it is another

nightmare. You will be too busy on camp to think about collecting late payments, so have all monies in before setting off to camp. If people book and then don't turn up, you still have to pay for their place but may find it difficult to collect money from them.

Insurance

Ensure your membership is up-to-date then email HEN's insurance officer at insurance@home-ed.vic.edu.au for a copy of HEN's insurance policy and the currency certificate. Familiarise yourself with the policy so you know what it actually covers.

Camp ideas

There are many types of camps. Some go for five days of hard play and others are very structured. Personally, I like having an activity focus but with lots of free time for the kids. The snow camp has been voted the best camp ever! And I think this is partly due to the confidence it builds and the group focus. It doesn't take long to be able to ski down a slope and the joy on all those faces is beautiful. The other nice thing with a group focus is that everyone is out on the slopes at 8.30am, even the sleepy teenagers.

Some other camp ideas I've been looking at are below. Let me know if you are interested in doing any of these or would like to take on the organisation:

- Horse riding the snowy mountains. I got a great deal: \$330 for three days including food and accommodation but then my son said he wasn't interested, so I don't wish to organise it.
- Canoeing down the Glenelg River or the Murray River for a few days.
- Sailing between Bali and Komondo island over eight days, stopping at islands, snorkelling and sleeping on deck. Hopefully this one will be in April/May next year. Watch *Otherways* for prices and details.
- Lightning Ridge
- Bike camps
- Riding camels in the desert.



Photos: Bendigo Goldmine Excursion by Colita
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