



*Out of the near-treeless prairie of Saskatchewan grew a mighty oak in camping whose name will be forever inscribed in the annals of organized camping . . .*

## HEDLEY S. DIMOCK

**B**orn in Nova Scotia, Hedley grew up in western Saskatchewan where his family homesteaded in the 1800s. Trees were scarce on the prairie and cutting firewood for the long winters was a major undertaking, involving long trips away from the family's sod home. Little wonder young Dimock grew to love the lush, deep forests of Ontario's Algonquin Provincial Park where some of his richest experiences were later spent at a camp on Canoe Lake called Ahmek.

Young Hedley left the family homestead to complete high school, then on to the University of Saskatchewan, and later the University of Chicago where he did graduate work in religious education. Summers were often spent in counseling positions at YMCA camps in Saskatoon and Regina. His leadership potential was recognized early on when Taylor Statten, executive secretary of Canada's National Boys' Work Board, invited him to come help him prepare a place in the woods where boys would learn to become men and leaders. Dimock joined Camp Ahmek as a religious education instructor in 1924, after Statten founded the camp in 1921.

It was at Ahmek — where Statten strove for "a character-building atmosphere which would inspire boys to develop the best that is in them" — where young Dimock nurtured the skills and beliefs that led to his own growth as a camping leader and camping authority. And it was at Ahmek where his influence would be imparted to no less than a future prime minister, namely one Pierre Elliot Trudeau who later attended Ahmek in the Thirties when Dimock was Ahmek's director of personnel and training.

Ahmek was much a proving ground for Dimock in testing out and crafting his scientific approach to camping and human development. After five years of trial and error, he summed up his insight and experience in a book that has now become a classic in organized camping, *Camping and Character*. The book, coauthored with Charles E. Hendry, an American YMCA leader, did much to revolutionize camping, offering the vision and technique to turn camping from a largely recreational pursuit to a character-building, democratic educational process.

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Building character had always been a by-product of summer camp, but the book crystalized emerging thought and practice as to how character-building and social development could become the primary objective of camp. Central to this approach was a deliberate attempt to involve campers themselves in making decisions about the camp experience, and a commitment to bringing about individual growth by working with the group as a whole and molding organizational culture. In many respects, *Camping and Character*, published in 1929, was a forerunner of the "organizational culture" movement of the Sixties that proved popular in corporate and management circles. In addition, the book introduced the notion of goal-setting and assessing desired outcomes, which was adopted by many camps and human-service organizations.

*Camping and Character* proved so popular that it became much the impetus for a long series of "Camp Institutes" led by Dimock, Hendry and Roy Sorenson (of the YMCA) in the Thirties and Forties at George Williams College (formerly the YMCA College) in Chicago where Dimock was dean for two decades. The Institutes championed group process in their workshop format, long before the method was widely adopted in educational circles. Thousands of camp leaders came to know this group-centered democratic process at the Institutes. The list of Institute participants read like a "Who's Who" in camping, and a venerable series of 10 monographs was issued by Institute leaders on such subjects as character education, the democratic process at camp, interracial camping, and "Putting Standards into the Summer Camp." In 1948 the group collaborated on a master work, *Administration of the Modern Camp*, which Dimock edited.

The Camp Institutes are best remembered for establishing the framework and generating popular support for adoption of camp standards by the American Camping Association in 1948. For eight years Dimock was chair of ACA's standards committee, and his voice was instrumental in paving the way for this ground-swell support for safe camping experiences; his *Marks of Good Camping* was published in 1940.

For 30 years Dimock conducted workshops and training sessions, and made keynote addresses at camping conferences in the U.S. and Canada, including ACA conferences. Dimock was active in ACA's Chicago Section, of which he was its first president 1936-37 (now the Illinois Section).

The contributions to camping made by Hedley S. Dimock can be summed up in his dedication to making camping a physically safe, character-building experience for campers, and a personal and professional development process for camp directors and staff. He often said that concepts are always in a state of evolution, and even the organizations we work for may lose their vision and focus. But in the end it's the individuals we work with who make the biggest impact on the world around us.

He shared a vision with Taylor Statten and Eustace Haydon, (Saskatchewan clergyman, Y leader and professor of comparative religion who had invited him to the University of Chicago), that camping offers the best possible setting for training future world leaders. When he remembered that Prime Minister Trudeau was once a hale and hardy camper at Camp Ahmek, a smile would invariably cross his face.

### Hedley S. Dimock, *Camping Giant*, 1891-1958