

A NOTE ON THE CAMPING CRAZE THAT IS CURRENTLY
SWEEPING AMERICA

As much as anything else, the Coleman lantern is the symbol of the camping craze that is currently sweeping America, with its unholy white light burning in the forests of America.

Last summer, a Mr Norris was drinking at a bar in San Francisco. It was Sunday night and he'd had six or seven. Turning to the guy on the next stool, he said, 'What are you up to?'

'Just having a few,' the guy said.

'That's what I'm doing,' Mr Norris said. 'I like it.'

'I know what you mean,' the guy said. 'I had to lay off for a couple years. I'm just starting up again.'

'What was wrong?' Mr Norris said.

'I had a hole in my liver,' the guy said.

'In your liver?'

'Yeah, the doctor said it was big enough to wave a flag in. It's better now. I can have a couple once in a while. I'm not supposed to, but it won't kill me.'

'Well, I'm thirty-two years old,' Mr Norris

said. 'I've had three wives and I can't remember the names of my children.'

The guy on the next stool, like a bird on the next island, took a sip from his Scotch and soda. The guy liked the sound of the alcohol in his drink. He put the glass back on the bar.

'That's no problem,' he said to Mr Norris. 'The best thing I know for remembering the names of children from previous marriages, is to go out camping, try a little trout fishing. Trout fishing is one of the best things in the world for remembering children's names.'

'Is that right?' Mr Norris said.

'Yeah,' the guy said.

'That sounds like an idea,' Mr Norris said. 'I've got to do something. Sometimes I think one of them is named Carl, but that's impossible. My third-ex hated the name Carl.'

'You try some camping and that trout fishing,' the guy on the next stool said. 'And you'll remember the names of your unborn children.'

'Carl! Carl! Your mother wants you!' Mr Norris yelled as a kind of joke, then he realized that it wasn't very funny. He was getting there.

He'd have a couple more and then his head would always fall forward and hit the bar like a gunshot. He'd always miss his glass, so he wouldn't cut his face. His head would always jump and look startled around the bar, people staring at it. He'd get up then, and take it home.

The next morning Mr Norris went down to a sporting goods store and charged his equipment. He charged a 9 x 9 foot dry finish tent with an aluminium centre pole. Then he charged an Arctic sleeping bag filled with eiderdown and an air mattress and an air pillow to go with the sleeping bag. He also charged an air alarm

clock to go along with the idea of night and waking in the morning.

He charged a two-burner Coleman stove and a Coleman lantern and a folding aluminium table and a big set of interlocking aluminium cookware and a portable ice box.

The last things he charged were his fishing tackle and a bottle of insect repellent.

He left the next day for the mountains.

Hours later, when he arrived in the mountains, the first sixteen campgrounds he stopped at were filled with people. He was a little surprised. He had no idea the mountains would be so crowded.

At the seventeenth campground, a man had just died of a heart attack and the ambulance attendants were taking down his tent. They lowered the centre pole and then pulled up the corner stakes. They folded the tent neatly and put it in the back of the ambulance, right beside the man's body.

They drove off down the road, leaving behind them in the air, a cloud of brilliant white dust. The dust looked like the light from a Coleman lantern.

Mr Norris pitched his tent right there and set up all his equipment and soon had it all going at once. After he finished eating a dehydrated beef Stroganoff dinner, he turned off all his equipment with the master air switch and went to sleep, for it was now dark.

It was about midnight when they brought the body and placed it beside the tent, less than a foot away from where Mr Norris was sleeping in his Arctic sleeping bag.

He was awakened when they brought the body. They weren't exactly the quietest body bringers in the world. Mr Norris could see the bulge of

the body against the side of the tent. The only thing that separated him from the dead body was a thin layer of 6 oz water resistant and mildew resistant DRY FINISH green AMERIFLEX poplin.

Mr Norris un-zipped his sleeping bag and went outside with a gigantic hound-like flashlight. He saw the body bringers walking down the path towards the creek.

'Hey, you guys!' Mr Norris shouted. 'Come back here. You forgot something.'

'What do you mean?' one of them said. They both looked very sheepish, caught in the teeth of the flashlight.

'You know what I mean,' Mr Norris said. 'Right now!'

The body bringers shrugged their shoulders, looked at each other and then reluctantly went back, dragging their feet like children all the way. They picked up the body. It was heavy and one of them had trouble getting hold of the feet.

That one said, kind of hopelessly to Mr Norris, 'You won't change your mind?'

'Goodnight and goodbye,' Mr Norris said.

They went off down the path towards the creek, carrying the body between them. Mr Norris turned his flashlight off and he could hear them, stumbling over the rocks along the bank of the creek. He could hear them swearing at each other. He heard one of them say, 'Hold your end up.' Then he couldn't hear anything.

About ten minutes later he saw all sorts of lights go on at another campsite down along the creek. He heard a distant voice shouting, 'The answer is no! You already woke up the kids. They have to have their rest. We're going on a four-mile hike tomorrow up to Fish Konk Lake. Try someplace else.'