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## The Creative Campfire Handbook

# CAMPFIRE STARTERS

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### Lighting the Fire

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Anything used repeatedly loses its power. The trick is to gather a bag full of ideas, use them, throw out the flops and add new ones as they come along. An idea is to have a wire strung from a tree or something else high, in such a way that it couldn't be seen. Then when the command comes for the fire to be lit, something comes shooting down the wire into the fire and lights it. Like lightning or a big fire ball or something. Use a "flaming arrow" which is guided on a piano wire into the fire.

Near a lake? Have some boys in Indian clothing (OA members?) bring a lighted torch by canoe from some unseen place to the council ring. After a solemn ceremony, or a BRIEF speech, the torch bearer lights the fire. Be sure those in the ceremony stay in character. Not near a lake? Same as above, but they walk in. We used to do this for OA ceremonies. The principles would come across the lake in canoes which had highway signal flares burning from inside the bottom of the canoe. This cast an eerie red light on them which made a great effect until the camp ranger started making them wear life jackets. I can see the reasoning, but the ceremony was never the same.

The lifejackets (PFDs) can be deleted from the ceremony if the protection of the "Indians" can be assured in another fashion such as having an emergency boat manned and ready to go with trained lifeguards. Also a must is to have the PFDs for the "Indians" in the canoe, for this is the law. Another way to provide protection for the "Indians" is to keep the boat running near the shore instead of coming across the lake with lifeguards posted along the route. If the right measures can be taken, the "Indians" can canoe without wearing PFDs, but every possible means available must be used to protect the canoeists. In short, BSA policy makes the exception for "Special Ceremonies" i.e. OA and camp lighting, when special precautions are made. This is the ONLY time scouts can be allowed in boats without PFDs.

We started the fire with an Indian ceremony where the "Indian" shot an arrow out into the water (our campfire area was on a point jutting out into Puget Sound). Then the fire was lit (I forget exactly how, doesn't really matter). Then the first song leader came clambering up over the rocks leading up from the water wearing a wet suit with the arrow in the back! Of course he led everyone in "What do you do with a Drunken Sailor?" ;^)

This was one of the best campfire openings I've ever been involved with. Prelight the fire (prevents embarrassment), then have someone in period dress carry in an historic US Flag, talk about it BRIEFLY then lead the Pledge to the Flag. Spotlight the Flag as Red Skeleton's "Pledge of Allegiance" is played. Then everyone joins in the Pledge. Prelight the fire, then, once everyone is present, everyone joins in an almost in control rendition of "We're All Together Again." Most any Court of Honor opening can be adapted as a campfire opening. Build your campfire program around a theme, then develop an opening that fits.

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## Chemical Igniters

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Fill a Styrofoam coffee cup about 2/3 full of heavy duty break fluid and put it down in the fire. We also coated the fire with some diesel fuel from the camp tractor so it would start quickly. Then make up some sort of ceremony that ends with someone standing near the fire (preferably in the back). This person then pours a handful of hth pool cleaner into the cup of break fluid, says something appropriate ("Let there be fire!"), and steps back (especially if you used diesel). The hth and the break fluid will make some popping noises and then burst into flames. After we perfected the ceremony, it had a really great effect. Imagine someone walking up to the fire and commanding it to light, and then it bursts into flame! Great imagery, but of course it is terribly dangerous.

To trigger this remotely, tie a disguised string to the cup of break fluid and have a concealed assistant pull it over carefully to dump into a tray of hth powder. Second Source: In the pyro arena, adding a small quantity of petro-chemical to chlorine (1-2 oz. break fluid and .5 bag powdered HTH are good) will generate a very hot, smoky flame. It takes about 15 to 20 seconds for the reaction. There is an audible hiss several seconds before ignition that can be used for cueing. Any number of devices can be used to deposit the brake fluid.

**CAUTION:** This effect gives off a quantity of potentially harmful gas. It should only be used when the fire is some distance from the audience. You should not store pool supplies and automotive supplies near each other, either, for the same reason. Pine 'o Pine (a pine oil based soap) and pool shocking compound (Calcium Hypochlorite) - dust from the last campfire makes a hell of a bang. At my wood badge course the staff did this. They had the scoutmaster put on the dust. The fire went off with a bang, blew off the scoutmasters campaign hat. First time I have ever seen anyone teleport himself. He refused to help start anymore campfires for the rest of the course. Be careful. If you have enough distance between the fire and the nearest Scout so that you don't asphyxiate anyone, finely ground potassium permanganate heaped into a pyramid with an indented top into which glycerin is poured produces a spectacular violet flame which does a nice job of starting a fire. There are a number of chemicals that will add color to a flame. For example, copper sulfate adds blue-green.

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## Spark coil igniter

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Years ago when I was a scout, the leaders let the scouts "take charge" of the campfire ceremony. One of the most successful campfire lightings was done by using a 6-volt lantern battery, an old Ford spark coil, some wire and charcoal lighter. On command like "let there be fire" an accomplice connects the battery to the spark coil and the spark starts the fire.

**THE SETUP....**Place the spark coil as near the fire as possible to keep from having to run the high-voltage the wires any farther that necessary. The coil can be hidden, out of view, in rocks near the fire. The high-voltage wire and the return ground wire can be buried in the dirt. Run the wires for the lantern battery to the place where your accomplice will be and cover the wires deep enough that no will see them or trip on them. Use a small jar lid to hold the liquid charcoal lighter. Fill the lid with paper towel and add the charcoal lighter. This lid is placed in the center of the fire. The ground wire is placed under the lid. There is no reason to make a good connection to the lid because the spark from the high-voltage wire will jump to the lid and then the ground wire. The high-voltage wire must be placed above the lid so the spark will jump into the paper towel and liquid charcoal lighter and thereby light the liquid. Build a tee-pee of kindling around and over this setup so the lid and wires are hidden. Build a log-cabin campfire around the tee-pee. Inside the log-cabin, add more kindling. Add about twice as much as you think you need. The more kindling you add the faster the fire will grow.

**THE LIGHTING.....**Upon command from the ceremony fire lighter, the accomplice connects the battery to the wires and the spark coil generates the high-voltage spark. This spark lights the liquid charcoal lighter and the liquid will burn long enough to start the kindling.

**PROBLEMS AND FAILURES...**Failure to use the proper wire for the high-voltage. Once I used twisted "bell" wire to go from the spark coil to the fire. The insulation broke-down and there were sparks all along the twisted wire but none in the fire! You can use old automobile ignition wire -BUT- remember the wire will be destroyed by the fire. Between the time the fire was set and the time the ceremony was to start, the high-voltage wire was no longer over the lid and the spark jumped from the high-voltage wire to the OUTSIDE of the lid and didn't start the liquid charcoal lighter. Lantern battery was nearly dead. It did work but there were some time of helplessness before the fire started. The spark coil was not well hidden and someone spotted it. When the spark coil operates there is a vibrating reed that makes noise and gives off sparks that are easily seen at night. I STRONGLY suggest that you experiment with lighting a lid of charcoal lighting fluid before you make this setup for the ceremony. This could save you from the embarrassment of turning to the crowd and saying "Anyone got a match?". I know.....I have been there.

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## **Rocket Ignitor**

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Bury an outdoor extension cord just a couple inches underground. Plug an old, thin extension cord into the end of the outdoor one and make sure the junction is secure and buried. Then run the loose end of the cheap cord into the fire and attach a model rocket igniter on the end. Put that in a bundle of matches, being sure the igniter touches at least one match. Then build the fire around that (and used a bit of kerosene to be sure it lit). Then all you have to do is use a 6V lantern battery and touch the two prongs on the outdoor extension cord to the battery terminals (the person doing this should be well hidden behind trees or whatever). Then, on command, the fire would light. It was VERY impressive the first few times we used it, but now it is getting a bit old. I am thinking about just lighting it with a torch for a while, and then in a couple years, using the wire/igniter method again...

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## **Saltpeter**

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How about mixing saltpeter and sugar in a 2 to 1 ratio. You can put a big pile of it in the middle of the campfire and string a trail of it away from the campfire and then light the trail. It burns hot and smoky, so use caution - it beats the heck out of gasoline. I used to use this mixture for low cost smoke bombs as a kid. The salt peter I used came from the drug store and was used as an animal diuretic.



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## **Black powder Ignition**

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Put a small pile (about 2 or 3 inches around) of black powder in the center of the firewood to be lit. Run a small line of black powder from this pile and out to a small (1 inch in diameter) pile located on a flat rock. Put a firing cap (used in a muzzleloader) on the edge of the 1 inch pile. Have another "fuse" running to another pile of black powder in the second fire to be lit (we had 2 fires).

At the proper point in the ceremony, have someone strike the ground (the firing cap, actually) with a "tomahawk" or other hammer like item. This would cause 2 strips of fire to ignite the wood (of course, the wood would have kero or other ignitable liquid on it). The only problem would be if someone steps on (and breaks) a "fuse".

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## **Flash Bulb Ignitor**

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When I worked on camp staff we regularly came up with innovative ways to start the campfire. At one camp we used a car battery, flash bulb filaments and some kind of quickly combustible material (dryer lint soaked in lighter fluid, dry tinder, etc.). There was a couple of wires buried in the ground leading from the campfire to a point out of sight behind some bushes. A staffer would touch the wires to the battery terminals causing the filaments to flash and ignite the combustible material, thus starting the fire as if by "magic". Now, this was coupled with a pseudo-native American "ritual" to light the fire by calling on the "spirits."

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