

BACKCHAT

BY JOHN COONEY

The Joy of Camping

ON THE OFF-CHANCE THAT it might stop raining for more than quarter of an hour, I'd like to share a hot summer tip with parents who've already started panicking: "Oh no! School holidays! What on earth will we do with the kids?"

Answer? GO CAMPING!

Why? 'Coz the best family holidays the Cooneys ever had were the simple, no-frills weeks we spent together under canvas in the great outdoors ...

Our favourite hideaway was up the Coromandel. And getting there was always a mission – packing tents, toys, surfboards, canoes, protesting kids, and the inevitable flatulent dog ... then driving for four hours in a green Austin Maxi with the heater jammed on high, and the dog farting, and the boys kicking the seats, and their sister threatening to vomit over everyone. But time flies when you're having fun. And before we knew it, we only had three-and-three-quarter hours to go.

I must also confess that nothing tested our family's togetherness like pitching the tent in teaming rain:

- Dad snapping at mum for tangling the ropes and letting the ground-sheet blow halfway back to Auckland ...
- Dad shouting at sons for trying to spear eels with two tent-poles he thought he'd lost ...



- Dad grumping at daughter for standing cross-legged in the downpour, refusing to go behind a bush and demanding she be taken home to a "proper toilet".

But the memories? Ah, they'll be with us till the day we die: hanging a make-shift shower in the trees ... killing flies in our long-drop loo ... snorkelling till our fingers looked like raisins ... spying on nudists down the far end of the beach ... cooking damper on long sticks over hot fires ... and singing noisy songs under starry night skies?

We had no shops or DVDs ... no cellphones or Xboxes ... no Big Macs with large fries and Coke. But unbelievably good times were had by all. And my kids got the message loud and clear: **THE BEST THINGS IN LIFE ARE FREE!**

You want to glue your family together and help your kids feel fully alive? GO CAMPING! Touch and taste creation in places you've never been before. And don't return home until your clothes smell like dead hedgehogs! ❁

JOHN (GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDER) ADMITS:
"CAMPING IS WHERE YOU SPEND A SMALL FORTUNE TO LIVE LIKE A HOMELESS PERSON. BUT TOASTED MARSHMALLOWS MAKE IT ALL WORTHWHILE."

75% OF STATISTICIANS ARE 90% CONFIDENT 52% OF THE TIME.