

Needed: Adventure For Kids

By DOROTHY BARCLAY

"SEEMS like," a twelve-year-old said rather wistfully the other day, "seems like you have to be rich in order to live rough."

The lad had just been studying summer camp notices offering youngsters not much older than himself canoe trips into the Canadian wilderness, trail riding in the Rockies, archeological digging expeditions in the Southwest, "real, rugged ranch life" or "a summer before the mast"—all at a considerable fee, of course.

"What can I do that's fun?" "What can I do that's exciting?" "What can I do that's Real Adventure?" These are questions this boy, like many other youngsters, is asking.

There's a fine neat playground not three blocks from his home but his elders know better than to suggest he run down there. Swings and slides and monkey bars have long since lost their attraction. After years of doing everything to give him "security," his parents are at a loss to answer his appeal for a new dimension to his young life—for something more than love, affection, safety and material comfort can supply.

THIS problem has been popping up increasingly in discussions among recreation specialists. "In too many communities," one of these experts commented recently, "it is practically illegal to be a growing boy."

Recognizing the restraints civilization places on the young, some teachers and ministers, and city officials, too, have made a plea for more challenging activities. In his report to Mayor Wagner on delinquency prevention last



Desire for adventure, to test strength and skill, can drive boys like this one to risky exploits.

year, former Deputy Mayor Henry Epstein recommended that more thought be given to providing playgrounds that offer opportunities for freer, more spontaneous play; and to programs that "bear promise of meeting that very human desire for a safe scare, a limited hazard."

NEW and challenging playground equipment is being designed and produced; nevertheless, the establishment of "adventure playgrounds" is a slow business in most communities. Concrete sculptures riddled with tunnels and caves, pipes to crawl through and "free-form" mounds to climb upon, complex webs of cables and masts so woven that the action of each child affects the action of all the others—these take some "selling" to many recreation commissions.

"Junk" playgrounds in which youngsters can build their own secret huts or castles or forts from scrap lumber, in which old automobiles or locomotives or even airplanes are set up for legitimate invasion are another alternative. But these simply do not fit the picture of tidy park areas prized, for good reason, by most citizens.

It might very well be that

volunteer groups could get the best results, most quickly. Certainly those who want a new type of playground for their children or a more adventurous type of recreation program will have to make their voices heard.

Another form of activity which provides an outlet for the youthful need for adventure is school camping, an experiment gaining favor in a growing number of communities. Other countries have carried the camping idea even further. "Snow classes" held in the mountains of France blend school work with skiing instruction. And in Great Britain, "Outward Bound" schools—sponsored by a trust—offer youngsters, 15 to 17, a month in either mountains or aboard ship, camping and mountain-climbing or working with sail and oar. The philosophy behind the British program is a controversial one. Geoffrey Winthrop Young, English educator, has expressed it this way: To realize his better self, everyone must pass in youth through some test of adventure and hardship—and the adventure must be real.

Certainly primitive tribes accepted this idea. Whether many modern American parents would go along whole-

heartedly with it is distinctly debatable. Regardless of this point, though, there do seem to be a growing number of Twentieth Century mothers and fathers who want their children to have more engrossing play experiences.

COMMUNITY cooperation, sparked by energetic non-professionals, has in some areas carried activities beyond such excellent but thoroughly conventional activities as ball-playing to include—in season—such soul-satisfying sports as sailing, horseback riding, skiing and small scale mountain-climbing. Less muscular but even more exciting to some teen-agers have been dramatic workshops and dance groups or classes in painting and sculpture.

Parent groups interested in sponsoring programs of these or other kinds can get guidance from the National Recreation Association, 8 West Eighth Street, New York 11. Individuals with a big idea but a dearth of know-how will find solid practical suggestions for proceeding in "Youth Work on a Small Budget" by Ethel M. Bowers. (Single copies at \$1.50 may be ordered from Mrs. L. Blythe, Youth Service, Inc., Putnam Valley, New York.)

