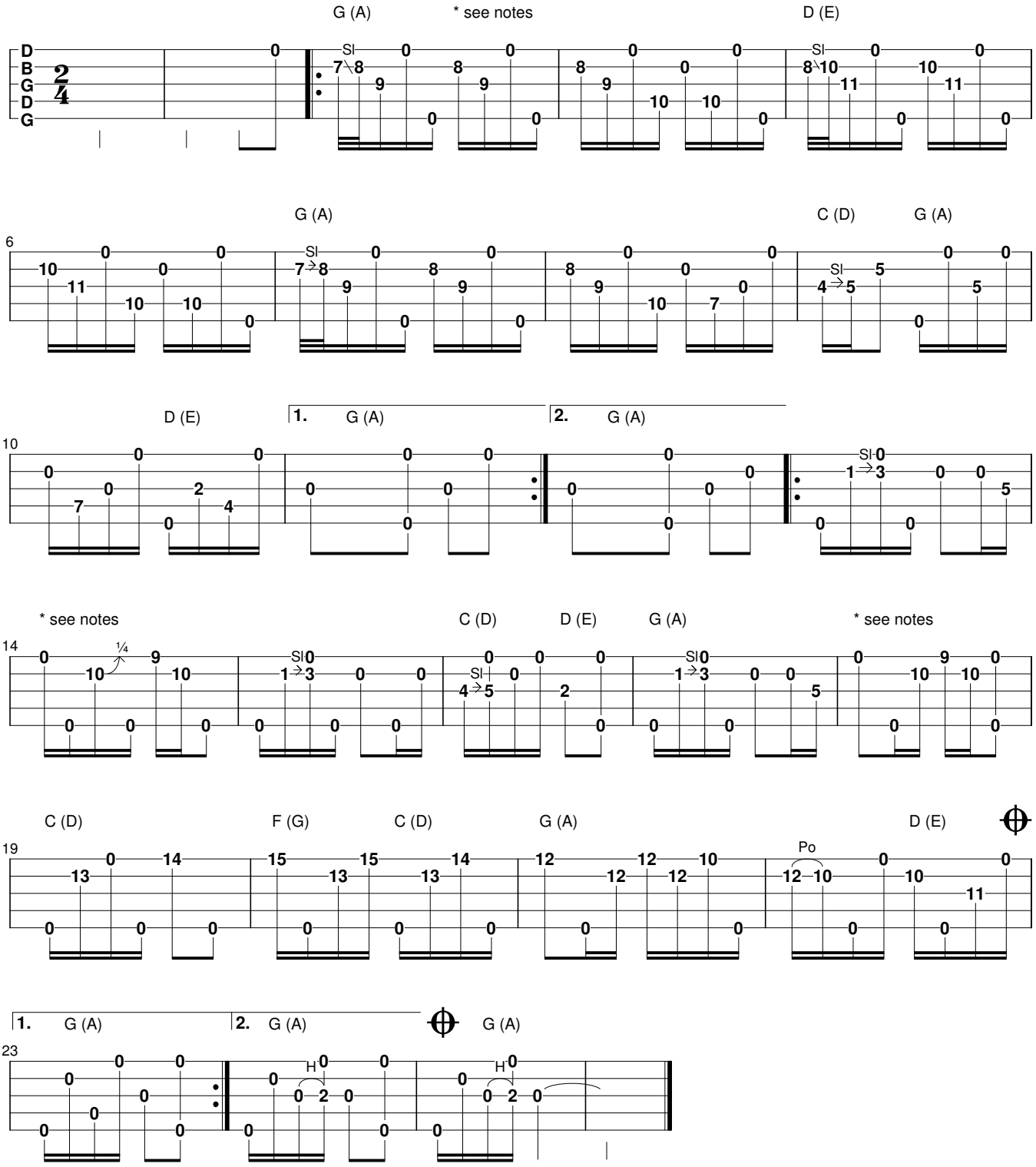
Camp Chase

Traditional

Arrangement (c) copyright 2011 by Donald J. Borchelt



There are two tunes called Camp Chase; this is the tune that was played by West Virginia fiddler French Carpenter. Carpenter always told a story when he played it, about how his grandfather Solly Carpenter won his parole by playing this tune in a fiddle contest while a prisoner at Camp Chase, a Union prison camp in Ohio. This is a crooked tune, with a number of extra beats in both parts.

The opening figures built around the tonic (measures 3 & 4, and 7 & 8) and dominant (measures 5 &6) chords are made with the index finger fretting the 2nd string and the middle fretting the 3rd string, sliding the whole thing around as necessary. On the tonic chord, the ring finger then gets the note at the 4th string, 10th fret in measures 4 & 8; on the dominant chord, the index comes over to the 4th string to get the same note. To my ear, the parallel structure of the two figures is critical to the feel of the tune.

In the B part, the phrasing in measures 14 and 19 are interchangable. In the original Carpenter version, the melody deviates somewhat in that repetition, but I'm playing it more or less the way it is played at the Monday night jam at Sandy's Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts- the way John Gersch and Kathy Fletcher, who lead the jam, like to play it.