

It's a cliff hanging experience for Outward Bounders

SUE FENWICK

It takes courage to swing outward, leaving the safety of your perch and reaching for the ledge above.

You take one look behind you, over the lip of the ledge you're standing on. Below lies 100 feet of empty space; above another 30 feet still to be climbed.

The only fingerhold withing reach

is a small ledge above your head. The rocks dig into your fingertips but, surprisingly, you hold and pull yourself up to a secure handhold.

You know the ropes will hold, that there are backup support systems, but you're still nervous. The Instructor gives you encouragement, and for the first time you begin to feel an inner confidence.

Such is the experience at the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School, where students push themselves, and in the process, discover new personal qualities.

One experiences the silence of wild places, of sleeping under the stars. And, one learns to rely on the mind and body, to trust and respect others, and to expect responsibility.

At the outset of the course I was one of ten strangers milling around Thunder Bay Airport, an interesting mixture of ages and backgrounds. June, a 25-year-old teacher, had never paddled a canoe. George, a 37-year-old account executive, was overweight and out of shape. He dropped 10 pounds on the trip and wished he had believed the literature that advised physical conditioning, conditioning.

Outward Bound began in 1941, in Wales, the brain child of educator Kurt Hahn. He was an exponent of experiential education--learnin by doing.

His philosophy was that if you give people a chance to step out of their ordinary routines, amazing things could happen.

Today, more than 34 Outward Bound schools located on five continents provide powerful supplements to traditional forms of education.

There are several courses available at the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School, located 150 km. north of Thunder Bay. I chose the 24 day expedition that took me deep into the wilderness.

I wanted to find out what wilderness really was. Until now, camping

meant too many people, too many camper-trailers, and someone else's radio.

One of the integral parts of the experience was the three day solo in the wilderness. For many students, this was the first time they had been alone.

It is the opportunity for contemplation and self awareness in some of the most magnificent scenery in North America. For most students, solo is the high point of the course.

And remember, you don't need to be an athlete of Olympic calibre to take an Outward Bound course, but it is suggested that you be in reasonably good physical condition.

Out. Bound expedition

MARK ZWOL

York Expedition founder and Outward Bound zealot, Ronnie Ng, plans to undertake an independent philosophical and cultural comparison of Outward Bound schools that should take him halfway around the globe--providing he obtains the one essential ingredient--money.

Ng, a second year physical education student at York, has been actively involved with Outward Bound since 1979, and hopes to visit several international Outward Bound bases to further understand the varied teaching philosophies of those schools.

"Although the basic Outward Bound philosophy is common to all schools - cultural, political and environmental differences determine variation of the ways in which foreign camps teach," Ng explained.

Money is the big problem

But money is the big obstacle in Ng's path at present. While Ng is shelling out \$1,000 from his own pocket for the project, there remain a few miscellaneous items like airfare (\$2,300), expense for four months (\$1,500), film, travel, and insurance.

The various Outward Bound schools he plans to visit have agreed to give him free accommodation and participation in their programme, but Ng is looking at an approximate \$3,500 goal he must reach by May to get his project off the ground.

Nothing New

The Outward Bound experience is nothing new to Ng. "For the past five years I have been actively involved with Outward Bound and other outdoor related organizations and I have also been travelling extensively," Ng said.

"I have experience working for the Outward Bound organization as a support staffer during the past two years. Last summer, I worked as a guide for the Maine National High Adventure leading white water canoe trips and backpacking trips on the Appalachian trail."

"This project will be beneficial for me in pursuing my career as an Outward Bound instructor, and will also help me to bring information on "experiential education" back to Canada."

Upon returning to York in September, Ng has offered to make himself available for multi-media slide presentations and discussions of the entire trip.

Ng also hopes to run tutorial lectures and a possible movie production of his experiences abroad. "I will be presenting slides, a travel log, a written paper, if possible a movie, and organizing discussions for students, college tutorials, organisations and sponsors, and other interested institutions," Ng said.

"Thus I hope to inform the York community, and also to benefit educators and environmentalists at large."

Anyone interested in helping Ronnie Ng or obtaining further information can call him at Founders College.

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