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A Rare Adventure in Living

COLORADO OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL

In times past Plato said, "Let us build up physical fitness for the sake of the soul." Colorado has a place known by few where this concept is paramount. It is called the Colorado Outward Bound School.

THIS SCHOOL, the only one of its kind in the Western Hemisphere for young men 15-23, originated in the summer of 1962 near the ghost town of Marble where many of Colorado's lofty 14,000 foot peaks are located. COBS is one of seventeen Outward Bound Schools around the world.

All were created to give youth an opportunity for strengthening themselves physically and psychologically and for exploring their potentials and discovering their limitations through a rigorous program of adventure and hardship in the mountains.

COBS is not a survival school nor a mountaineering school though both are emphasized for application in the final expeditions. It's unlike the typical summer camp in that the curriculum is so designed to show an orderly sequence of daily classes leading up to the climatic events near the course's end.

Three 26-day sessions make up the summer training period with 96 boys each session. They are mixed and divided into eight patrols. The author was one of the eight patrol instructors.

THE BOYS, from all walks of life and all over the U.S., Canada, and Central America, are trained to enter empty-handed the rugged alpine wilderness to live off the flora and fauna during their two-day solo survival treks. They are taken on four and five day expeditions covering up to 100 miles, taught technical rock and snow climbing techniques on hundred foot cliffs and steep icy snow-fields, given training in mountain rescue, and put through a rigorous course of physical conditioning.

Other training involves skills in conservation, knots, first aid, map and compass, fire-fighting, geology, weather analysis, leadership, campcraft, alpine cuisine, axemanship, packing and splicing, etc. The school is on 24-hour call to assist in any mountain search, rescue, or fire-fighting emergency. The boys and instructors live in army tents while at school. Sixteen of the 26 days are spent in the back country away from school.

In addition to the boys trained, the summer session of 1962 included 75 members of the U. S. Peace Corps--who were trained for duty in Nepal and other mountainous areas around the world. Another Peace Corps group was trained this past summer.

COBS is not the ordinary summer camp as many parents have envisaged nor is it a cure-all for the problem or pampered child or a factory for "instant men." It is comparable to the toughest physical training found in the armed forces. Furthermore, it teaches the son of the President of General Dynamics and the delinquent son of a Puerto Rican immigrant from the lower east side of New York City self-confidence, character, responsibility, and patience.

THEY EAT, work, cuss, shiver, get scared, and learn to take the hard knocks together without complaining. The strong learn to hold themselves in check and to help the weak while the weak learn to help themselves.

Today young people crave adventure. If you don't give it to them they eventually seek it on their own - much to their dismay or demise at times. To fulfill this adventurous craving such experiences as rappelling off 150 and 300 foot overhanging rock walls, scrubbing clothes on a washboard, crossing a Burma rope bridge 40 feet high suspended between two aspen trees and running a gruelling six mile marathon at 9,000 feet elevation up and down mountain roads are provided.

Other experiences of killing a porcupine and burning off the quills before roasting and eating it, swinging through a 300 foot aerial ropes course, surviving on frogs and snakes, climbing treacherous 14,000 foot mountains of loose rock, and spending a night on a ridge 13,500 feet high bivouacing where snow is melted for water on primus stoves and the wind blows incessantly are also important in developing inner self-direction.

THESE EXPERIENCES are a far cry from a Saturday night at the beer joint, drag racing down U. S. 40, lying on the sofa at home in front of the TV, or driving back and forth to school six blocks away in a new Corvette. Yet, once these boys have had these new experiences they wouldn't trade them for anything.

They leave COBS tired but triumphant with a crisp piece of paper in their hand which says they have completed a rare adventure in living. It only lasted 26 days and it was "hell on wheels" but it may have given Juan Hernandez Ethridge Warren Covington III or Bernardi Eachnewycz a new outlook on life.

COBS students are not taught to be daredevils. They are taught to develop good judgment, compassion for their fellow man, stamina, and to realize that they are not competing against one another but against themselves. At the end of the 26 days many of the intangible scars of contemporary society and a passive existence have disappeared and many appear to have a head start toward manhood.

Ambivalent feelings prevail among instructors as the boys walk the three miles down the mountain that last morning, the sun rising, to busses that will take them back to the same environment whence they came ...for better, same, or for worse.

In the COBS program nature has a unique way of making a permanent impression in the minds of these young fellows. Perhaps it is in this manner that the backbone of America might be strengthened for the tests and trials ahead and the things that Americans believe in preserved for posterity.
