

## MEMORIES OF MY COLORADO OUTWARD BOUND YEARS (1964-1967)

Herb F. Kincey

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Afterwards  
When the hardships and anxieties of our ventures  
Fade into the darkest recesses of our memories,  
We are left with the good things;  
And we return again,  
Drawn by the vestiges of yesterdays that today  
are no more than  
Images.

Lawrence Curson  
From "Summit", a magazine, May 1974

It has been forty-two years since I worked for Colorado Outward Bound at its Marble base camp. Since that time the school and its program have changed significantly, and the lives of all of us who were there in the early days also have changed as we followed different paths through life and have aged.

Although my memory of the events that occurred between 1964 and 1967 has faded overall, I still recall some of them as clearly as if they had taken place yesterday; and the names of a number of staff members and students with whom I became friends are still in my address book. We stay in touch.

What follows is a list of some of the things I remember most about COBS and the people who spent time there when the school was young and we were young:

Inspirational morning readings conducted by staff members and students. Joe Nold's Thoreau reading that ended with "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity" was a classic.

Paul Petzoldt driving pitons into aspen trees while teaching basic climbing techniques. His most remembered statement: "Don't you let some monkey pull YOU off the mountain!"

Students in 3-man tent groups cooking their meals over smoky wood fires in #10 billycans. Stoves were used only when we found ourselves above timberline, during stormy weather, or in an emergency situation.

Instructors who packed handguns on expeditions and occasionally shot small game which their students eagerly skinned, cooked, and ate. Some city kids had never seen meat except for what their parents brought home from the store wrapped in plastic. This was a revelation. Some of the other instructors caught fish.

The wailing school siren commanding us to crawl out of our sleeping bags early each morning, run down to Lost Trail Creek, and leap into the icy water. The temperature of the stream usually hovered below 40 degrees. "Running the dip" was not an optional activity in those days, whether we were in camp or out on an expedition. High altitude, ice-filled mountain lakes were especially invigorating.

Negotiating the ropes course high events without the protection of safety lines or climbing helmets. Fortunately, no one ever fell. However, it is important to remember that almost no individuals or outdoor programs used helmets until the seventies. COBS bought its first real climbing helmets in 1965 from an aerospace company in California that had recently begun producing them for mountain rescue teams on the west coast. Ropes courses were not yet in use elsewhere.

Competitive activities that continued throughout the course. These competitions, such as the wall & beam, boiling water, chopping logs, the marathon, etc. took place between patrols, almost never between individuals.

Our director, Joe Nold, and his instructors meeting in the staff lounge (it burned down many years ago) just before the end of each course to determine who should and should not receive certificates of completion. In those days just staying the 26 days did not mean a student would necessarily pass. As I remember, he had to earn a certificate. The staff discussed and approved each person individually. This was all pretty subjective, but it seemed to work.

Joe offering students who failed their course an opportunity to stay around for a few days and work until the beginning of the next course, then retake it at no charge if there was an opening.

The fact that the school originally accepted only young males between 16 and a half and 22 years of age. The first girls' course, C23G, took place the summer of 1967. It proved to be a success. Others followed.

Learning that a 26-day Outward Bound course was a one-time experience and was generally considered to be a "rite of passage". Graduates were not allowed to sign up for another course later on. This was not a problem, however, because:

Students would often say as they left Marble for the last time something like, "I wouldn't trade anything for this experience, but it will be a cold day in hell before I ever come back to this place."

Paul Petzoldt giving memorable introductory talks the first night of each course. He would fill a hiking boot full of water at the beginning of his presentation and not explain the reason for doing so until the very end. Paul was a consummate showman.

Paul requiring everyone to wear wool clothing throughout the summer. Hikers often would come across 12-man COBS patrols trekking through the mountains with their pants legs rolled up and flaps wide open, trying to stay cool. On the other hand, hail and snow often fell above timberline, even in July. Hypothermia could be a serious problem during wet weather. The wearing of wool made a real difference in insuring the safety of a group, since it helped maintain body warmth, even when wet. Today's synthetic materials were not yet in use.

Students paying \$350.00 for a 26-day course (about \$13.50 a day). A new COBS instructor was paid about \$350.00 a month. Former students who stayed on to work as "sherpas" received \$100.00 a month and all they could eat. A number of our sherpas eventually went on to become patrol instructors.

"Green death", a mixture of powdered lemonade and powdered lime Jello that could be consumed as a hot or cold drink or mixed with snow. This was very popular.

The sound of the wind above timberline whistling through the lightening holes of the uncomfortable World War II British aluminum pack frames worn by students.

Patrol members sleeping under clear, 4-mil plastic tarps on evergreen bough beds. I don't believe foam pads were issued until 1965.

Frequently having to use preliminary (blue line) USGS topographic maps covering parts of the Snowmass Wilderness. Until 1965 there were no published maps of some areas where we ran our program. Even instructors occasionally became lost with their patrols. Most embarrassing!

Teaching students how to identify edible plants and encouraging them to try almost anything that was not poisonous. Students were issued fish hooks and small game snare wires before going on their 3-day solo. During this event they were allowed to forage for food. Many did.

Everybody drinking water straight from the uncontaminated, crystal clear mountain streams and lakes without fear of contracting Giardia. In fact, most of us had never even heard of it. I first became infected in the Snowmass Wilderness the summer of 1973, six years after leaving COBS. Unfortunately, today water throughout most of our nation's backcountry areas must be purified.

Being waked in the middle of the night by the school emergency siren and running down to the garbage dump to put out a "forest fire" set by the staff among the dead trees. The use of gas and diesel fuel helped things along. Marble fire fighters, from 2 miles away, showed up one night with their water tanker, believing the entire school was burning. After that we always called them first.

Occasional evening jaunts by staff members (and sometimes Sherpas) to Marble, Redstone, or even Aspen for food and drinks. Students also would slip down the road periodically to Marble for sodas and snacks. One rode back up to school on a stolen horse in 1967. His request to be sent home the next day was granted.

The emphasis on outdoor skills and leadership training which included first aid, technical rescue, fire fighting, survival, axemanship and use of other tools, fire building, outdoor cooking, use of map & compass, rock climbing & rappelling, problem solving, etc. Several friends who attended COBS in the early days have told me in recent years that the Outward Bound training they received was a major factor in their surviving military tours of duty in Vietnam later on.

Tap Tapley running with his instructor trainees on long, killer marathons through the mountains. Tap usually came in first in spite of the fact that he was twice the age of most of the runners.

Another of Tap's exploits involved leading his trainee class along the spectacular and intimidating two and a half mile ridge running between Capitol Peak and Snowmass Mountain, both 14,000 footers. On one occasion after returning to the Marble base camp, a still terrified trainee quietly packed up his gear and left for home.

The first mobile course (C-19) the summer of 1966 which used the West Elk Range as its program area. By the end of the following year most Colorado courses were being run as mobiles.

Larry Higby riding his horse cowboy style through the mountains during our expeditions where Larry served as a safety officer. Thanks to his accuracy with his .22 cal. handgun, there often would be an edible game bird or small animal hanging from his saddle which would be passed on to a patrol hungry for meat. During the winter Larry worked out of Lander, Wyoming as a big game hunting guide. His knowledge of outdoor living under all conditions was extensive.

Frightened students trying to work up the courage to take that first step over the edge of the 150 ft. "big rappel" on Sheep Mountain. Most did, often with verbal support from their instructor and fellow patrol members.

Developing real friendships that sometimes have continued for over 40 years. I believe the intensity of our lives at COBS was partly responsible for these long-lasting connections, involving both students and staff.

I feel sure that most Outward Bounders from the early days who read this account have vivid memories of their own relating to the time they spent at the school. For many of the students, and probably even some of the staff, the Colorado Outward Bound experience in that long ago time was a truly defining moment in their lives, one to be remembered and savored down through the years.

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NOTE TO THE READER: Nothing written in this memoir should be construed as being critical of the Colorado Outward Bound School or its leadership during the years I was there. Outward Bound began operations in this country in 1962 with the opening of the Colorado school and the running of the first courses (C-1, C-2, and C-3) out of Marble that summer. The program was imported from the U.K.

At the time there was nothing even remotely like Outward Bound in the United States. It took about five years to develop and put in place the sort of trained staff, management tools, program, and safety procedures that by 1966 would place the school on the cutting edge of outdoor education in this country.

I feel other staff members and I were very lucky to have been able to work at COBS during its formative years and to have played a small part in the school's development during that time. Outward Bound has come a long way since that first Colorado course in 1962.