

# Outward Bound: wilderness adventures

By **DONNA LEINWAND**  
State & National Editor

*... So we packed our wool and our polypropylene  
Hopped on the plane and arrived on the scene.  
And we hiked, and we hiked, and we hiked some more.  
We hiked so much 'til our hair was sore.  
When it was over and the work was done.  
We forgot about the pain and remembered the fun.  
We really can't tell you the truth, you see.  
You have to find it out on NOLS or OB...*

National Outdoor Leadership School and Outward Bound rap by former UNC participants

During the summer of 1984 Camille Grady learned that she did have a "second wind."

"I didn't eat much and it rained continually. You could hear all the animals," Grady said of her four-day solo expedition on Outward Bound, an outdoor experience-oriented survival course. "I was in shouting distance of another person but I was all by myself on a 10-acre island. The thought crossed my mind that if I were seriously hurt, I might not be able to get help."

Grady's experience was similar to what 15,000 other Outward Bound students endure each year. Outward Bound, founded by an English merchant ship owner in 1941, offers about 600 outdoor courses in wilderness survival.

"We use the outdoor setting to learn by doing," said Linda Brackett, registrar at North Carolina's Outward Bound school in Morganton. "We set up in purposefully stressful situations."

In 1961, Josh Miner brought the first Outward Bound school to the United States, said Audrey Sparre, an administrative assistant in the marketing department of Outward Bound's main office in Connecticut. The school, located in Colorado, offers courses in rock climbing, rappelling, backpacking and ropes. Other schools in Maine, Minnesota, Oregon and North Carolina offer similar programs as well as courses particular to their areas. All schools hold programs year-round and are independently run by directors.

In the Maine school, students can participate in a sailing expedition and sea kayaking, Sparre said. The school also has land programs in the Adirondak mountains and a cycling tour of rural New England. A winter program in the Florida Keys is also offered.

A 15-day dog sledding course is offered in Minnesota, Sparre said. Outward Bound offers some semester courses, but most range from four days to 30 days. Sparre said. The minimum age for a student is 14 years but there is no maximum age, although the school may ask some students to have a physical examination.

"The bulk (of students) are high school and college students," Sparre said. "One woman in her 70s has gone on two (courses). We don't require any technical know-how — just a good physical condition and a willingness to try."

At the North Carolina school, students can go rock climbing or swing on an obstacle course 60 feet in the air. They can also go backpacking in the Appalachians and canoeing in the Florida Everglades.

"We are impelling people to increase their physical abilities, their self esteem," Brackett said. "Some people come back and say it actually changed their lives. It's self-sacrificing."

Costs vary with the type and length of the program, Brackett said. A typical nine-day program costs about \$900, and the 23-day program is about \$1,300, she said. Everything except personal items and clothing is provided by Outward Bound.

Outward Bound is an exercise with specific goals, Sparre said. "People go away thinking they've done more than they thought they could do," she said. "They have a greater wealth of strength."

In most programs, students participate in a "solo." During the solo experience, students are put in a general area with a whistle and minimal food and water, Brackett said.

"It's not an exploring time. It's a reflection time," she said. "After spending so much time with the group, it's nice to get away for a while."

On a standard 23-day course, participants usually spend three days and two nights on their solo, Brackett



Outward Bound offers participants a chance to climb mountains

said.

"My solo was very weird," said Andy Ward, a freshman who went on a rock climbing course in the North Cascade mountains of Washington. "We had to write a letter to ourselves. I had to fast for three days — just water, no food. You just concern yourself with you. I wrote a lot about different things like my family and my life."

Ward said the group had to live without a lot of things people take for granted.

"Toilet paper... the best stuff is snow. Rocks, oh pain — I've even heard of people using pine needles. Of course, leaves are the most common," he said. "If you get hurt, you just have to take care of it yourself. Gorp is what you eat. It's high energy trail mix. It's what you live off of. The first thing I did when I got home was make pudding."

Sparre said the danger associated with courses in the Outward Bound program is more perceived than real.

"Outward Bound has an excellent safety record," she said. "Bee stings are a big concern, said Mike Fischesser, director of the National Training Institute of Outward Bound, which trains instructors for the programs.

"You might get a couple of broken bones (during each program)," he said. "It's safer than driving a car or playing football."

In 1986, two Outward Bound students died, Fischesser said. In Colorado a student had a heart attack on a ropes course, and a

were injured, he said.

"Everybody (in the group) has their own version of hell," he said. "To me, it's twist pass, which is four miles up a mountain. Halfway up, this swarm of mosquitoes attacked us. We just ran up the mountain for about a mile. We were putting on jungle juice like crazy."

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Instructors receive advanced wilderness emergency medical training, and two instructors go with each group, Fischesser said.

A different type of wilderness experience is offered by the National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming. In 1965, a Colorado Outward Bound instructor and mountaineer founded the school with the goal of teaching outdoor leadership skills and low-impact camping, said Paul Calver, marketing and admission director for the program.

"Outward Bound teaches personal development. At NOLS we teach students to be competent outdoors and to conserve the wilderness," Calver said.

NOLS programs usually run for about 30 days, but two week and semester programs are also offered, he said. Courses in sailing, sea kayaking, wilderness camping, backpacking, rock climbing and natural history are available. About 1,800 people participate in the program every year.

There are about 17 people in a group, with three instructors certified

by NOLS and skilled in first aid, Calver said. The minimum age is 14 and there is no maximum age.

"We make the assumption that people are beginners," he said. "We also review their medical records."

The philosophy of NOLS stresses wilderness conservation, said Alex Hodges, a freshman from Boston who spent last summer in the Wind River Mountain Range in Wyoming with NOLS.

"The instructors grill it into you you don't want to be damaging the wilderness," he said. "They teach minimum impact camping where you leave a place the same as you found it."

Hodges said his group was divided into tent groups which were given food rations for eight days. During the day, the groups would hike to a specific place by following a topographical map, he said. The entire group would meet at night, he said.

"We cooked our own food. I really liked the cooking," he said. "Hiking in a 20-person group would be cumbersome. We'd split and have to get to a certain place. After we met, we'd all split up again and camp. You don't want 20 people in one congested area."

Hodges said his group once had trouble locating a trail they were supposed to take to reach their camping area.

"We had to back-track for about three hours," he said.

Students had classes on weather patterns, fly-fishing and first aid, he said.

During the final days of his program, the group had to participate in a "walkout" — the students had to find their way to the road where they would be picked up and taken home. Hodges said his tent group decided to fast for the four days of the walkout.

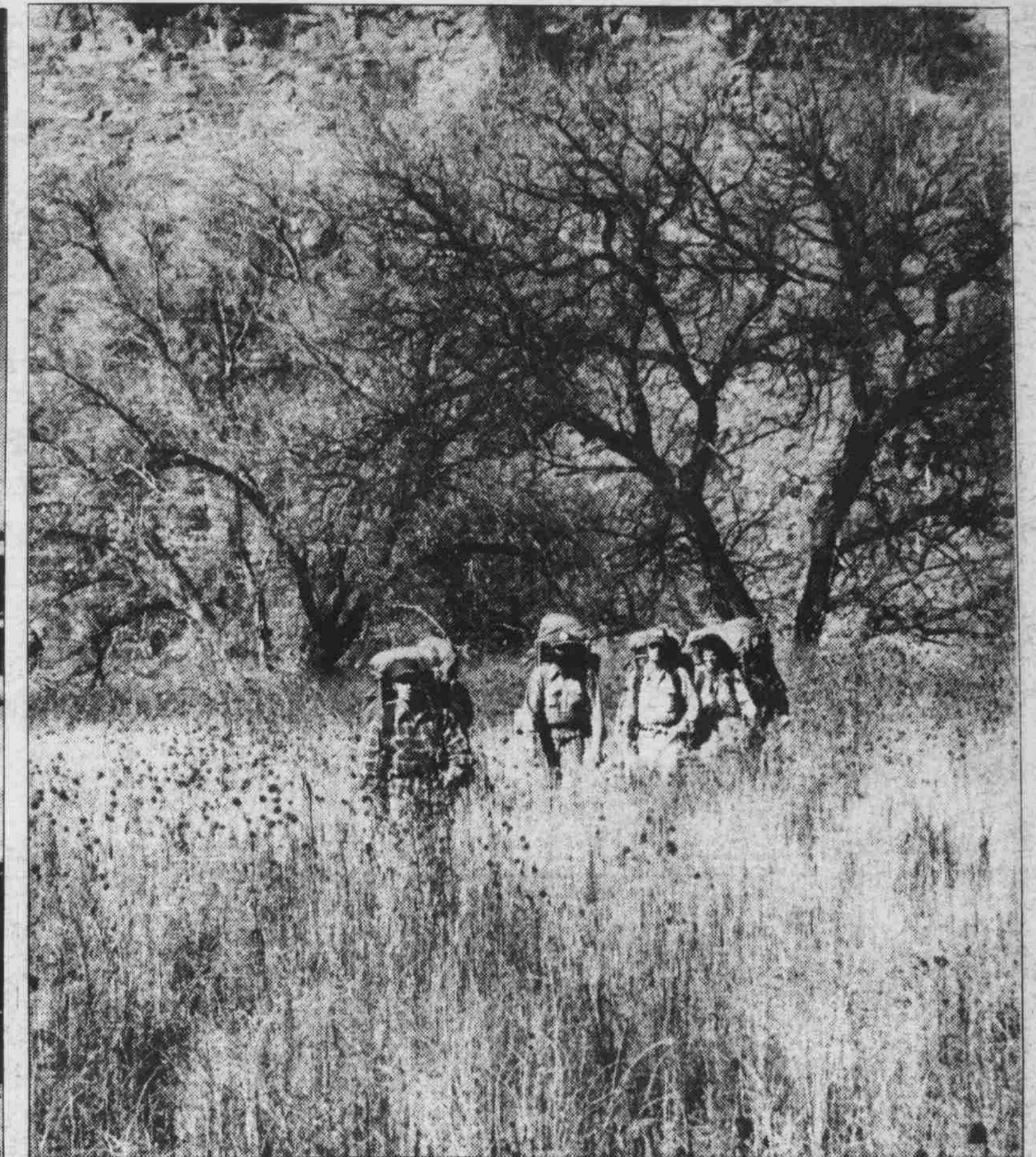
"Physically, the program was a challenge," he said. "Even a greater challenge was mental. You have no contact with the outside world. You can't even write home. You have to tolerate one another."

Though injuries weren't prevalent, Hodges said the group did experience a few problems.

"One guy got slightly hypothermic. It took a while to warm him up," he said. "One girl was so homesick, homesick for the whole time. She kept on crying during hikes. One day I was hiking with her and it was just miserable, we were going so slowly. I kept thinking that this day was never going to end. Those are the sort of mental challenges we had to overcome."

Hodges said the group developed strong friendships.

"We had camaraderie. There were a lot of energetic people," he said. "Looking back, I realize how valuable it was. I've learned a lot of basic skills, but I just think the most valuable thing is the friendship. You have to depend on each other."



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