

Outward Bound

offers student sense of fulfillment

By ELIZABETH DANIEL

JACK looked back at me as he pulled himself along the cave floor and said "I was tired of sex, drugs and technology so I decided to try Outward Bound."

Thousands of people each year subject themselves to this three-week experience called Outward Bound that places them in sometime dangerous and often exhausting circumstances without the comforts of civilization.

Some of the Outward Bound students, like Jack, are looking for something besides drugs and sex to excite them. A lot of the students enroll in the course to "find themselves" and to help solve personal problems. Many more go on in search of an adult camp, a place to get some exercise in the outdoors. And, still more go to test themselves. They are looking for a challenge.

"We have to stay out here in the cold and do all sorts of climbing and camping," Jani, a 19-year-old from Iowa said. "Sometimes it's really scary and if you're not in great shape it's tiring. I just wanted to see if I could do it."

Whatever their reasons are they come. Over 900 students participated in the courses offered by the North Carolina Outward Bound School (NCOBS in Outward Bound lingo) in 1980. The North Carolina school, one of seven Outward Bound schools in the United States, is located at the base of Table Rock mountain outside Morganton, and has another camp at Green Cove in Tennessee.

The standard 23-day winter course at Table Rock, titled "Winter Mountain Wilderness" in the brochure, focuses on backpacking and camping and includes intensive sections on rock climbing, caving and ropework.

For two days I followed two crews trying to understand what they were experiencing.

Most of the activities involve a great deal of physical stress but both students and instructors have said that it is the combination of learning to cope with one's own stress and of the other crew members that makes the course such a unique experience. From the first day of the course until the last, the crew is together 24 hours everyday, except for the solo, a three day period when the student is alone with minimal food and equipment in a secluded area.

Some students have said they know their crew members better than they had known anyone else in their life. "This



Outward Bound 'students' learn group unity crew must get all members over the wall.

group has gotten so close," said Jack who worked at a television station in Spartanburg, S.C.

"I do things in front of them, and that means the women too, that I wouldn't do in front of anybody else. And, it's cool."

WHEN I caught up with my first crew in Worley's cave, outside Bristol, Tenn., they had been together a little longer than a week and were preparing to make a three day venture into a cave. For them, the 55 degree cave would be a relief from the freezing weather they had been in all week.

The crew dumped all their gear at the mouth of the cave and the two instructors gave them a general itinerary and instructions on using the carbide lamps.

They would travel into the cave, set up base camp, where they would sleep for two nights, and then they would begin exploring the cave, the instructors said. Also, the cave was fairly warm so they did not need much clothing, perhaps only a sweater and coveralls, they said.

At that, the crew, four women and four men, began peeling off their five layers of clothing and pulling on their coveralls. Just as Jack had said, there was no bashfulness. One of the guys stepped out to the mouth the cave and used the bathroom.

Though I was only with the crew for about five hours, I was able to see that they did work together as a team. As we traveled back into the cave they regularly rotated the heavy loads and checked up on the slower members. No one argued or complained.

The crew trudged for more than an hour, with 60 pound packs, water and a litter, over the slippery rocks and sometimes crawling when ceiling was too low for them to stand upright.

One man, Bruce, quickly assumed leadership of the crew, directing the rest and watching over them. No one questioned his judgements as they followed him back into the cave's darkness.

The first crew varied greatly in ability with some of its members always lagging far behind. But regardless of the struggle, as some of the weaker members ran to keep up and the stronger went painfully slow, the group was very congenial and seemed pleased with the course. They never complained, always had their equipment ready and helped each other readily—their crew morale was almost too high.

The crews are not always so optimistic about the course. Many times during the courses the students want to quit and go home.

I joined my second crew early the next morning, after a restless night of sleeping outside in temperatures below zero. They were, on the average, about 10 years younger than the first crew and not at all happy with the course.

When I met most of them, they were huddled around the stove in the dining hall, complaining about the weather and having to go out. Several of the crew members had been sick the day before so the crew was in base camp and had missed its first day of rock climbing.

This crew did not have a leader as the first crew did. Their decisions were together, they acted together and certainly complained together.

Everyone of the eight members was saying it was too cold and that it would be ridiculous for them to go outside.

"The winter session is just that much more difficult because of the cold," one of the instructors said. "It adds an incredible amount of natural stress to the stresses that are built into the course."

When I looked at the crew huddled around the stove after sleeping several nights in the sub-zero temperatures, I thought I could see that stress working. According to the Outward Bound philosophy, that stress is supposed to bring the group together and that crew was certainly close, even if they did hate the program at the time.

"I understand how they want us to rough it, but for the \$900 we pay, we could at least have some heat," said Laura, a dancer from the New York School of Performing Arts. "This is just ridiculous to have to sleep out here night after night."

As the crew pulled closer to the stove, they traded a thermometer and tried to prove they were still sick.

Vann, a student from Niceville, Fla., looked at the thermometer and said, "Damn, it's right there, normal on the dot." He then glanced around the cabin. The instructors had left. Vann lifted the top from a pan of water on the stove and stuck the thermometer in.

"Shit. It busted," he said, trying to keep the staff from noticing. The rest of the crew just laughed and consoled for his failure. He quickly hid the broken thermometer in the first aid kit.



MIKE, a college sophomore from Tampa, Fla., said after he noticed he did not have a fever either, "I wish everybody were sick today so we wouldn't have to go out."

After the instructors returned and found the crew still bunched around the stove, they were disgusted.

"What do you think you're out her for, just to sit around the heater and get warm? Most of you don't have all the stuff we talked about getting last night. I just don't believe it. Now, get ready," one of the instructor said.

When the crew finally started moving, the differences between the first crew and the second were obvious. The first was strictly divided into leaders and followers, but his crew worked together as one unit.

When one crew member had forgotten to pack a rope and others had remembered, the entire crew acted as if they all had forgotten.

The cold weather had severely limited the crew's activities. The crew would miss the usual rock climbing expedition and work on rappelling and belaying. The rappelling, which involves descending a cliff with a system of ropes, would be limited to 30 and 40 feet because of the cold.

Once the crew got outside and began learning the belaying skills, their attitude became more positive. All but one of the crewmembers learned the skills quickly.

The belayer is responsible for catching the student who rappels. One student would pretend to fall so the belayer could learn to catch him.

When the crew moved up the mountain to begin rappelling, the trust that had arisen among the members became a noticeable factor. If the climber made a mistake while he was rappelling and could not catch himself, it was the responsibility of the belayer to catch him. Though each of them had just learned to belay and none had rappelled before, most, perhaps even all, of the crew members had great confidence in their belayers.

They worked together getting the equipment set up and helping each other tie knots in their ropes. No one took charge. They just got the job done.

The entire crew watched as the first student began his rappel. At first he gripped the rock nervously, then he slid down the side. He ran up the side of the mountain shouting about how great rappelling was and the rest of the crew cheered him on.

When it came my turn to go, several of the students huddled over me helping me tie the various knots on my

saddle seat and pull my shaking as I backed over belayer, who had my life high school student from the belaying techniques didn't trust myself to be

THE first step was a ladder, to a rather gripping the rock hands were and inexperienced the ropes, myself or my

Several crew members ledge shouting encouragement "Just lean back and members, an experienced

"I don't think I can so weak," I yelled back. I be up the rock. I could hand would never see these pe

"There isn't any pressure try it"

Questioning my sanity, ledge. There was no pressure rope and easily glided down the crew cheered me for

The crew worked on the headed over to do a short. This crew had already done would go on two more before day solo before the end.

The next day they would Grandfather Mountain, or and compass use, as well. During this expedition to minor role to prepare the which the instructors would

In between the two expeditions their solo. He can do anything during the course when the

"I'm really looking for here and I really need time

According to the Outward Bound group experience and the experience, with all the Outward Bound such a re