

Issues of Progress

Trends in the Training of Outdoor Leaders

Pete McDonald

Excerpts from *Peter Graham: Mountain Guide. An Autobiography*, P Graham, 1965, published by A H & A W Reed (1973), New Zealand. Reproduced with permission from Reed Publishing (NZ) Ltd.

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Progress in human affairs is often a forward and backward journey. This essay looks at some trends in outdoor-leader training and in outdoor education. In particular it highlights some basic predicaments dumped on us by progress.

Sections 1–6 look at some industry-wide developments in and concerns about the training of outdoor leaders. Section 7 focuses more narrowly, onto some trends and issues in outdoor education. Section 8 concludes.

I refer frequently to a leading modern textbook, and so the essay serves a second and incidental role, as a rather thuggish critique of that book. I write from the heart, unrestrained by any chains of conformity, and thoroughly prejudiced by my practical background. What the hell. You can't teach an old dog dispassionate objectivity.

1. Our industry

July, 1999. It is a sodden curse of a day, good for nothing except the Dunedin coal trade. The rain sweeps in from the northeast. Each steep street vanishes up into its own cloudiness. My harbour view reveals only dripping eucalyptuses on a backdrop of uniform greyness. I set out on an hour's run that will climb 600 metres and provide an acute understanding of stratus.

One attraction of Dunedin, even on a dismal day, is the abrupt transition from city to empty countryside. There's hardly any merging. A last house, a garden fence – then, immediately – Lindsay Creek, neatly channelling a lumpy patch of turf. Normally the stream is bubbling and rocky and clear, today it is brimming and brown. Goodbye, road. Hello, track. And leaf-mould. And vivid moss. You wind through grassy clearings for a few minutes, and then you enter a dense plantation of tall conifers – kahikatea, I'm told. It is a dark geometric place that lovers of natural bush might not appreciate. But I like this section; the pine needles give soft running. I'm puffing now, as the way starts curving and climbing.

The Bethunes Gully route, which I'm on, is a well-graded gravelled track, and I feel lucky to have this excellent torture so close to home. I am not the first Dunedinite to take a liking for Mount Cargill. The publisher and road-walker, Sir A H Reed, pilgrim-

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aged yearly to its summit right up to his ninety-ninth birthday. A committed pedestrian (he never learnt to drive) and an equally wholehearted Christian, he used to pause occasionally to sing a doxology.

Often when I run, I juggle with a few ideas from my writing. I have found that I can rotate three issues in my head. Sometimes I tackle a particular problem.

Today only one matter comes to mind. I am concentrating on my breathing ... and now, seamlessly, I am wondering about the term 'our industry'. What does it mean? Two related areas suggest themselves immediately: outdoor education and adventure tourism. And then a hotchpotch of other labels enters my head: outdoor recreation, adventure education, experiential learning, development training, outdoor management-training, corporate team-building, and adventure therapy – in fact, almost anything out-of-doors except duck-shooting and kite-flying.

Some people object to the word 'industry'. It lacks the aesthetic connotations that many of us would prefer it to possess. Its overtones seem not at all green. But 'our industry' is a useful shorthand term, and nobody has yet invented a popular alternative.

The different realms of the outdoor industry encompass a huge sweep of aims. So the New Zealand Outdoor Instructors' Association (NZOIA) accommodates a correspondingly wide range of outdoor leaders. As there are horses for courses, so too there are leaderships for aims. How can you write about leadership when you're addressing every variety from the instructor of vertical caving to the adventure therapist? Do their differing leader-crafts have anything in common?

The top of Mount Cargill materialises from the mist, and it answers this question for me. There's something satisfying about a hilltop, even when you're sharing it with opaque vapour and a repulsive TV mast ... Being up here, breathing the air, touching the rock, or being on rivers or on the sea, or underground ... being in such places ... this is the single but powerful link.

2. Towards maturity, respectability, and incomprehensibility

The descent offends the knees. I jerk the last few kilometres like a rheumatic old dog. There remains the crawl back up the same hillside as the steepest street in the world. I'm too proud to walk, so I manage a sort of treadmill imitation of running.

I arrive home feeling damp, contented, and at ease with the world. Physical weariness and mental elation: the same old fix. Shortly afterwards I pick up the newspaper and check the classifieds, while stuffing my face with chocolate-fudge cake. One advert catches my eye. Lincoln University is advertising what amounts, in our trade, to an aristocratic vacancy. These chances don't arise often, this is nearly as far as we can go:

Lecturer in Outdoor Leadership.

The Human Sciences Division at Lincoln University is seeking applications from Academics who have expertise in Outdoor Leadership or a related Social Science discipline ...

Applicants must have:

- relevant postgraduate academic qualifications (PhD preferred);
- teaching and research supervision experience;
- a well-developed research programme or a demonstrated capability to undertake research/consultancy.

It is an advantage for applicants to have a sound understanding of current professional practices in Outdoor Leadership. [Merely an advantage?]

My euphoria from the run subsides into an onlooker's curiosity in the ad. The outdoor industry in New Zealand is going the same way as that in the United States, the UK, and Australia. A small, specialist group of academics is forming, to provide a scientific view of outdoor leadership. To join the club you must be some variety of sociologist or psychologist, but if you also know a bit about bushwalking or kayaking it won't count against you.

This evolution was predictable and is seemingly unavoidable. The wind has been blowing this way for a long time. It's progress. It's maturity and respectability. It's sophisticated thinking. It is the indispensable professionalism stressed by NZOIA's proposed new mission statement. We should welcome the existence of the

From a drawing by H G Willink,
from *Climbs in the New Zealand Alps*,
E A Fitzgerald, 1896.



IS IT POSSIBLE?

'... I planted my axe firmly in the soft snow above me ... I grasped, however, the fact that Zurbriggen did not seem happy, and the idea flashed across my mind that it must be owing to my crampon resting on his head.'

academic specialism; it should not cause problems, provided that there is dialogue and respect between the different sectors of the industry.

Yet some aspects of the evolution alarm me. Is outdoor leadership merely a 'Social Science discipline'? Is it a science at all? What about the art of leadership? What about Peter Graham, the celebrated New Zealand mountain guide of the tweed-jacket period? How did he cope both without a Gore-Tex jacket and without a scientific view of guiding? Did his accident-free record result from thirty years of naive good luck? Was it a fluke?

Peter Graham wrote a thoughtful and inspiring life-story. We'll see later that his accomplishments came not of course from models of leadership, which hadn't been invented, nor from lucky chances, but from the gradual gaining of experience.

But that was a century ago. Now we've got the science of leadership. There is always the thought, If you can't beat 'em ... But Lincoln is too flat for my liking, and anyway I have never joined the world of strange words like 'pedagogy', preferring to remain staunchly in the world of unsubstantiated personal opinion, and so I don't visit the university's website for further information on this post, but I gather that the appointee will teach outdoor leadership in the Bachelor of Recreation Management degree.

British outdoor education, from where I come, has known such lecturers for thirty years. Typically he or she might be a proficient kayaker and rockclimber, a talented conductor of these activities, and moderately clever, in a plodding, tenaciously bookish way. As a group, in two senses these specialists on the theory of leadership form an elite, even if all of them would strongly disown any connotation of superiority carried by 'elite', which means 'the most powerful, rich, gifted, or educated members of a group, community, etc.'

Powerful? In a way, yes. Especially collectively. These lecturers are the influential people who will train the trainers. From their institutions could come future directors of centres and heads of departments, consultants, policy-makers and rule-writers. One or two of their ex-students might occasionally advise ministers or ministerial officials. They themselves might be called upon to give opinions to journalists or – this happens – coroners.

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Wealthy? Hardly. Not in New Zealand. We don't overreward our academics; their pay is not what alarms me.

Highly educated? This is where the dilemma lies, and particularly in the dazzling limitations of the scientific picture of leadership, and in the abstruse and barren language that has evolved.

Trends in North America have pushed the initial training of outdoor leaders into higher education. Dozens of American and Canadian colleges and universities offer outdoor-leadership degree programmes. These programmes are housed in diverse departments, such as physical education, recreation, forestry, and the social sciences. But there is no doubt about who are the expert talkers: a specialised body of 'new' knowledge has emerged with its roots in social-science theory, and with its own language.

3. Eminent modern textbook

Tribal life had its 'educated' elites. Humans organise and group themselves as efficiently as ants do. Even communism spawned its *crème de la crème*. And history is full of educated, specialist groups that became divorced from reality.

In western Europe, until the 18th century, Latin was the language of scholarship, diplomacy and theology. Isaac Newton wrote his works in Latin, hence his *Principia Mathematica* of 1687. The Western church, before the Reformation, operated exclusively in Latin, and it liked to think that its doctrines were infallible; no wonder, then, that the many officials in the ranks of the papacy lost touch with the common people.

New Zealand's university lecturers in outdoor leadership will not speak or write in Latin, but they will resort to sociologese and its cousin, educationese. In case you haven't met these distant relatives of English, here is an example:

Overload is caused by a rapid influx of information to the receiver. The human brain can convey information through the mouth about 10 times faster than the human ear can accept and transfer it back to the brain. When a sender chooses to speak this fast, the receiver commonly suffers from information overload, and a state of overarousal ensues ... [This form of noise] may negatively impact the quality of communication.

This style of writing is supposed to help novice instructors to acquire leadership skills that they might otherwise lack. Ironically, this example concerns communication, an ability that earns the label, 'metaskill'. The quote comes from *Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming* (page 251), a comprehensive American production built on a cumulative mound of PhDs and born of a madly wealthy culture whose fondness for facilitation is only surpassed by its love of litigation. Written by two of the sharpest thinkers in theorydom, Simon Priest and Michael Gass, it covers 'the technical, facilitation and metaskills of leadership', and will cost you about ninety New Zealand dollars. Metaskills are the new arrivals, and if, like me, you've struggled along without them for many years, your troubles are over.

If you harbour any initial doubts about the pioneering wisdom of this book, the note on its back cover should reassure you: 'This is the first book to provide in-depth information on the key elements of effective outdoor leadership.' Wow. A grandiose claim. One that shrieks for debate. Does this book come from intellects stratospherically above the simple minds of outdoor leaders of the past? Are we, as an industry, only just emerging from barbarism? Are there no other books that tell us much about presiding over a bushwalk? Have two hundred years of alpine guiding produced no insightful literature?

I will answer that question later on. For the time being, let's examine the 'new' knowledge.

If you're a recreator, intent on teaching skills and on letting the mountains speak for themselves, you will read this bumper textbook selectively. Although I'm a teacher, and although I recognise and value the ambitiously wide aims of mainstream outdoor ed, I myself fall into this recreator category. Ours is a relatively simple life. We tend to be more concerned with the weather forecast than with analogous metaphoric transfer. Yet *Effective Leadership* contains some clear thinking on technical skills, trip-planning, instructional methods, flexible leadership styles, and judgment, so it's worth a look.

If however you're bent on using the outdoors to change people in a quantifiable way - and many outdoor educators are, all outdoor manager-trainers are, and all adventure therapists are - this is the book for you. If you want your bushwalking to produce

significant changes measurable on the Rosenberg Global Self-Esteem Scale, this book might steer you in that direction. If you've got a researchy mind and if you adore the methodological and deductive approach, you'll find this book absorbing: three hundred large pages of rigorous scientific-ness, with nothing so careless as a gut feeling. The sociological approach includes dozens of cute models – diagrammatic representations of complex processes, such as risk-taking, or of complicated behaviours, such as teaching styles; the authors obviously believe that these boxy sketches will help people to become effective leaders. But the overall impression I get from this book is of an ideology that distrusts intuition and that underrates the view of leadership as an art, and so, despite the book's meticulous detail and scrupulous accuracy, it gives you only half the picture.

Whoa, stop there, dude! the authors might justifiably say ... An' cut the shit, ya limey bonehead ... our book *is* about the *art* of leadership ... the word 'art' means the exercise of refined, complex, and intuitive human skill ... we've simply broken down the complexities into twelve critical core competences.

Yes, chaps. Calm down. Put the guns away. The question is: how do you put the twelve ingredients back together, into an art?

Aw, jeez. Be patient. We're still workin' on that lil ole problem.

Isn't it tremendous! – trying to create leaders in the laboratory! Have you tried tests with rats?

4. No consensus on the training of outdoor leaders

That, it seems, is where the theory of outdoor leadership has reached, in the late 1990s. The academics have spent thirty years dissecting outdoor leadership, but people disagree how to put it back together. A parallel exists in the teaching profession; there are many excellent teachers who feel that what they learnt at college proved to be of only limited help in the classroom. The authors of *Effective Leadership* acknowledge the continuing debate over the training of outdoor leaders (page 5): 'Even if outdoor leaders could agree on what ingredients constitute a good outdoor leader, like alchemists, they would face a dilemma in utilizing these elements in the proper mixture and conditions – which is

equally important in making “golden” outdoor leaders. Currently, no consensus exists in the profession as to how to best prepare outdoor leaders.’

They mean in the broad sense. In a narrower sense, in some countries the training for specific instructing or leading qualifications is well established. For instance, the UK’s qualification for conducting groups of mountain-walkers has existed and evolved for nearly forty years. But in the broad sense, do all leaders need all twelve competences described in this book? And, when you have decided which abilities your leaders need, how do you help them to gain these abilities?

My own feeling on the training of outdoor leaders is that trainee teachers and instructors, like children, learn in different ways. I myself have a fairly systematic mind, but, oddly, I find the models of human behaviour – the little diagrams – strangely unsettling. So disturbing, in fact, that my resistance is absolute: I would hate my leadership to be influenced by a methodical diagram that looks like something out of inorganic chemistry. Give me the rockclimbing instructor whose approach to his or her job is strongly influenced by passion, by personality, and by instinct, and not by one of these arrow-covered inventions. I do acknowledge, though, that some outdoor leaders flirt openly with models. Furthermore, some enhancers of learning are so intoxicated on theory that they consider models imperative.

What does this lack of consensus mean, for the immediate future here in New Zealand? Will we continue to develop our own, very practical approaches? Or will the emphasis drift towards – I quote from the blurb – the ‘ideal text for outdoor leadership courses’?

Yes and yes. Our training of outdoor leaders is expanding and diversifying in several directions: more university lectures, more polytechnic lectures, more on-the-job training. It will continue to do so. There is already a medley of qualifications, from NZOIA Bush 1 to UIAGM guide, from national certificates and diplomas to degrees and further degrees. But among this diversity, Priest and Gass’s unique treasure-house of leadership will become common university tucker in New Zealand. It might be unchallenged

From a drawing by H G Willink,
from *Climbs in the New Zealand Alps*,
E A Fitzgerald, 1896.



THE ACCIDENT ON SEFTON.

'During this episode I lost my hat. At the moment of the accident my mind was perhaps equally divided between the effort of holding fast the ice-axes and the melancholy vision of this the last and only hat I possessed sailing gently down like a parachute towards the Copland valley.'

by differently slanted academic alternatives. The only books on outdoor education in Dunedin's University Bookshop appear to be analytic scrutinies from American social scientists.

One crucial question is whether a book such as this is a short-cut to knowledge. The answer is yes, a text on leadership can be a short-cut to a type of knowledge. But reading a book on brain surgery doesn't make you into a brain surgeon. What sort of bush-escorts and raft-pilots might this theoretical knowledge create? I don't know. But – holy shit! – what a lot of big words they'll know: universalizability, abdicratic style, adaptive dissonance, the eustress loop, effectance motivation, synergistic balance, autotelic experiences, ekistic relationships, paradoxical symptom prescriptions, isomorphic framing ... Who the hell wants to read the old, sentimental stuff, about sheep-bitten turf and marshy hollows? About the sighing trees and the song of the tui?

A friend has suggested to me that just because a book is so scientific, it does not follow that the grassroots leader has nothing to learn from it. Such a text, he suggests, is only a problem if read in isolation and unconsciously; judicious use of it is the key. This is all very well, but *Effective Leadership* emits such a pungent aroma of authority that the average student's judiciousness might be overwhelmed by scientific-ness.

I am prejudiced because I learnt entirely on the job, in a different tradition, a culture of precious landscape and hidden treasures, vivid sky and bare places, elemental hardship and values held dear – a culture built upon a rich history, full of intriguing characters. I was influenced, for good or ill, by a thread of rebellion entwined sagaciously through British climbing and much less strongly but still importantly through the more vigorous recesses of British outdoor education. Outdoor ed was different from school, it had the freshness of a dawn, and the cult of measurement had not yet infected it. So I could be excused for raising these neurotic concerns: first, it worries me that some New Zealand undergraduates might be burrowing deeply into COLT (the conditional outdoor leadership theory) without ever having instructed an adventurous sport; second, one can envisage the smartest bookworms heading for the academic pinnacles of the

outdoor industry without ever gaining any muscular depth of practical understanding, or any spiritual bond to wilderness or risk.

Far-fetched? It doesn't happen and won't happen?

I've heard two, different counters to my concerns. The first one tries to reassure me by saying that entrance requirements will specify a minimum level of technical competence and of outdoor-leadership experience. I don't know whether this is the case, at present.

The second counter-argument asks: why quarrel with the inevitable? And it also says don't be so narrow-minded, be more tolerant of others' conscientious beliefs, and it says that even if a few students stay in academia and progress along a cerebral career path that excludes dirty fingernails, this should not be a problem.

Bollocks. We are right to be concerned about the ever-widening gap between theory and practice. Overblown theorising forces us into a radical questioning. Chapter 22, for instance, in *Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming*, is a theoretical look at decision-making and it deserves not so much scepticism as outright ridicule. I cannot imagine any seasoned instructor reading 'Solving Problems Using The Multiphase Model' (page 267-271) without his or her doubting the practical use of such a model during stressful incidents. Yet the authors share no such doubts, stating categorically (page 272) that effective outdoor leaders should 'be able to recognise problems and know when to use the short or long forms of the multiphase model to solve them'.

Now, far be it from me to piss on the carpet of the pre-eminent experts, but this model-pushing declaration betrays an authoritative naivety and an inbred self-flattery. It's theoretical dreamland. It's almost psychotic, the methodological mentality gone mad; perhaps Messrs Priest and Gass should be held permanently in a secure psychiatric clinic. The human brain can sometimes be a clumsy and imprecise tool, but, compared to the brain, decision-making models are primitive. They trivialise our long years of weather-beaten learning. They travesty decision-making. Problem-solving on the mountains may transfer to logical hypotheses in books, but don't try the reverse; abstract knowledge from libraries is not necessarily applicable to the composite

and tangled reality outdoors. The key word here is 'necessarily', but, in a field in which a wrong decision can contribute towards a tragedy, the word 'necessarily' demands a rejection of the use of models at serious or anxious times. Sea-kayaking guides should not use models for making up their watchful or worried minds. They must never do. Never ever. To do so would be indefensible experimenting.

One wonders too about the use of models for more-routine decision-making. I cannot dispute their usefulness because I have never modelised myself: I refuse to sacrifice my intuition on a robotic altar.

Behind the scenes, there is obviously some dissent. I may not be the only sceptic questioning the practical relevance of decision-making models. Regarding the acquisition of the art of outdoor leadership – the putting-together of the hard skills, soft skills, and metaskills – Priest and Gass recognise that the jury is still out (page 6): '... the process of preparing effective outdoors leaders is still far from an exact science'.

Exact science it may not be, yet some New Zealand tertiary students are already contemplating models of outdoor leadership. The Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre (OPC), for instance, seems to be confidently pushing a barrowload of elegant models. My own, dissident inclination would be to favour the Greek view: experience is the beginning of knowledge. Experience fathers self-taught independent individuals. Experience and passion, together, inspire flair and inventiveness. I can't help feeling that models smack of institutionalised leadership, a 'designer leadership' that is synthetic, predictable, conforming, superficial, and disturbingly at odds with the essence of adventurous sports.

As well as noticing the Lincoln University advertisement, I recently spotted another situation-vacant ad, much smaller but still thought-provoking:

SENIOR Canyoning Guide: Part-time position in Queenstown for qualified Senior Canyoning Guide over busy summer season. Minimum 200 trips or 3 seasons; First Aid current; Rescue 3 course ...

From a drawing by H G Willink,
from *Climbs in the New Zealand Alps*,
E A Fitzgerald, 1896.



AN OBSTACLE.

'... we had occasionally to resort to various and ingenious devices to get up some of the smooth faces of stone that presented themselves to us.'

You don't often see an advert stipulating such lengthy exposure. It reveals a prudent practicality, a no-nonsense approach undoubtedly stiffened by the recent tragedy in Switzerland. I haven't got the NZOIA syllabuses in front of me, so I don't know how they compare. But there's a lot to be said for a fat logbook.

Incidentally, the early rockclimbers were avid log-keepers. Here is Ivan Waller, recording his first ascent of Fallen Block Crack, in Wales, a hard climb of its time (1927): 'My second-man was unable to follow. I had never seen him before, and I have never seen him since.'

5. An unsatisfactory language

New Zealand already has one homespun product influenced by the general public of America: the Mountain Safety Council's manual, *Managing Risk in Outdoor Activities*. In a previous article, I criticised the language of this hopelessly one-track handbook. Subsequently about twenty NZOIA members wrote to me. None of them requested a signed photograph, but one letter-writer did comment: '... there is a groundswell of resentment as to how the theorists have hijacked the industry'. Also typical was this exasperated response: 'Finally someone is speaking out over all the 90s jargon. Hallelujah!'

Here is another example of sociologese, from Britain's *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership (JAEOL)*, Volume 9, Number 4:

Though the aforementioned statistics are disappointing and appear to stand in contrast to some of the growth implied by the statistically significant gains achieved on the battery of psycho-social scales reported previously, there are some interesting and mitigating points which emerged in the naturalistic component of this study which may cast these findings in a more positive light.

Positive light? I have difficulty in viewing this bloated prose in a positive light. And I am not alone. An ex-colleague, Dave Edwards from Derbyshire's White Hall Centre, commented to me, in a letter about two years ago, 'if people like myself, Phil and Rory can't

really understand most of the articles [in *JAEOl*] after twenty years of professional involvement, does that mean that we're just twats and that White Hall hasn't been doing anything worth while?'

I should point out that these three veterans hold degrees and postgraduate teaching qualifications, and that one of them has a further degree, and that all have also undertaken unceasing professional development.

Shortly after I received this letter, my book *Climbing Lessons* was published. Towards the end of the book, I confessed a dislike for *JAEOl*'s unnecessarily complicated language. Many old mates and ex-colleagues have since written to me. One of them, an outdoor educator and a UIAGM guide, took an uninterested but tolerant line on the self-realisation and self-actualisation: 'There are plenty of dry and jargon-filled theoretical texts for those who like that sort of thing.'

I take a more critical stance than this, because such writing lacks humanity. It's hard to imagine real men and women behind it. Readers identify with people, not with abstractions such as the Adventure Experience Paradigm. Sociology is supposed to be concerned with human beings in society, and yet its language is remote and obscure, and as inaccessible as Latin.

Consider, for example, outdoor education. In the area where outdoor ed scores highest, its humanity, sociologese fails spectacularly to represent it. The passive verbs and the bizarre 'concept nouns' don't do justice to the intense human qualities of outdoor education. Nor do they provide a balanced and recognisable analysis of outdoor leadership. The scientific language is a poor reproducer of elation and misery. It seldom paints the sweat and the grime. It cannot punch home the strain of a crappy winter's day. It gives us only the faintest echo of laughter. Or it gives us laughter on a scale of 1 (for slight amusement) to 10 (for uncontrolled mirth).

The words let us down. Instead of touching our hearts, they erect a barrier.

Take any issue of *Horizons*. Where is the sentence that projects the warmth and openness of the born leader? Show me the phrase that encapsulates the zest and magnetism of the exceptional leader. Where is the galvanising flair? Or the fiery authority at a crucial moment? Where is the dialogue that betrays the false

certainty of the insufficiently experienced caving leader? Which words demonstrate the resourcefulness of the experienced mountaineering instructor? These are all deeply normal qualities, yet it is hard enough for accomplished writers to capture them, even with the advantage of flowing narrative; it is impossible for any theoretician to capture them in the monotonous gravity of systematic analysis.

But the theoreticians are not trying to do this?

No and yes. We enter a philosophical conundrum. We're talking about papers and articles on or related to outdoor leadership. The authors are trying to rigorously pinpoint the essence of such leadership. Returning briefly to the Priest and Gass book, its whole purpose is to describe the ingredients of competent and productive leadership. We are right to point out the irony that the language guarantees partial failure, however scrupulous the partial success. The writers *are* trying to capture the qualities of leadership, but, as I see it, they are producing an imperfect and incomplete picture.

Underneath our leadership lies passion. We love these sports. They give us joy. So the words that we use to describe this leadership should excite the inner senses: the mind, the soul and the spirit. Only clear and straightforward English will do that. Only utterly simple language will portray the charismatic drive involved in taking shitty kids in pissing rain on a routine day and giving them a damn good day out.

Frank Hyneman Knight, the US economist, said that sociology is the science of talk, and that there is only one law in sociology: bad talk drives out good. The theory of outdoor leadership provides a faultless application of this law; the bad talk obliterates the wonderment that enthral us. Our most novice instructors of kayaking are, I hope, alert to colour and beauty, yet our would-be luminaries frequently write as if such things did not exist. The bad talk lacks feeling; it lacks entertainment; it lacks humour; it lacks energy; it lacks surprise; it is an inadequate language with which to depict effective leadership.

Good instructorship is warm and friendly. It puts people at ease. But sociologese is frigid and impersonal. You can't get close to it. Everything about it switches you off; even its frequent use of surnames disconcerts you, because such use contradicts the

From a drawing by A D McCormick,
from *Climbs in the New Zealand Alps*,
E A Fitzgerald, 1896.



—THE WHOLE STRUCTURE GAVE WAY BENEATH ME.—

'When I had regained the surface I found a small place, fairly sheltered from the wind, where I could sit down and regain my breath after events which had been sudden enough to deprive me of it.'

informality of outdoor relationships. Sociologese is also divisive and alienating: it causes people to write angry letters. I see it as the colossal irony of the outdoor industry. You can end up with a national journal of outdoor leadership that has become a vehicle for academic papers, a journal with which only certain categories of outdoor leader can identify. I don't know what we can do about it. I do know that the issue is even deeper than I've indicated. The problem is not just the inaccessible style of writing, the words that tragically miss the romance; it is not just a question of too much science, too little art; it is also the fact that the special enthusiasms of some scholars, combined with their isolation and sometimes a hint of lordliness, and backed up by original research, can result in practical nonsenses.

Lionel Trilling, the American literary critic, saw bad thinking as the great vice of academicism. 'It is concerned with ideas rather than thinking, and nowadays the errors of academicism ... make their way into the world, and what begins as a failure of perception among intellectual specialists finds its fulfilment in policy and action.'

The social sciences do occasionally produce cheerful and engaging writers. But the theory of outdoor leadership produces few such writers. Instead, it churns out academic papers by the hundred and the occasional inaccessible textbook for lecture-land. We search in vain for personal reminiscences, acute insights, naked opinions, shaggy woods and wacky teenagers. We find only a relentless dullness. Until one of our academics learns to talk normally and entertains us – as a proficient and charismatic leader should – I for one can see only limited value in their dissections, and much to be suspicious of.

6. A fascinating read

Peter Graham, the mountain guide, wrote an autobiography, full of feeling and humanity. We soon discover the foundation both of his toughness and of his love of Westland: as an infant he daily walked three miles to school. He and his four brothers took a pride in getting to school on time. Then, after school:

Going home was a different matter. There was plenty of time then to look into all the nooks and crannies by the way. There were places where we could look right to the sea below and watch the huge breakers come rolling in. They dashed up against the great rocks and sent spray flying into the air. Here, too, the native birds were plentiful: the New Zealand crow, a bluey-black bird with yellow wattles and with a lovely note like a deep-toned bell; the saddleback; the green, red, and yellow-fronted parakeets; the tui and the bellbird. Wood-pigeons were there in hundreds.

We soon discover, also, the source of the integrity, strength of character, and gentle kindness that won Graham admiration as Mount Cook's chief guide. These qualities were laid down in a happy childhood. His mother was 'a wonderful little person ... with remarkable energy and vitality ... a reader of good literature and very fond of music and art'. His father was a strong and rugged Scot who, with three companions, rowed a whaleboat around South Island to get to the gold diggings on the Coast.

The family lived at Three Mile Beach, where Graham's father was the ferryman. Their house stood on a terrace back from the sea but overlooking the beach, and commanding a view of the ferry and the tidal lagoon behind:

The lagoon was bordered by forest trees from the water's edge, the forest extending eastward over the undulating foot-hills and rising to the snowline. Beyond ranged the Southern Alps. On calm days fine reflections could be seen in the lagoon's placid waters. We were well sheltered from the prevailing south-westerlies by a belt of native flax and a high windbreak fence of manuka scrub. A tall hydrangea hedge supported the windbreak on the seaward side. We were the only family living on the beach and three miles from any other habitation, but there was evidence of former settlers in several places. Within these lovely though isolated surroundings my brothers and I grew up.

So, just a few pages into the book, and a few years into the boy, we are thinking, These are the seeds of outdoor leadership.

Graham left school after Standard Three. Then came years of hard physical work and of self-reliance: vegetable gardening (a necessity), sluicing for gold, clearing acres of bush by hand, road-building by wheelbarrow, and exploration – the beginning of his mountaineering:

... Arthur [a goldminer] and I made plans to go into the Callery [Gorge] later in the year. I was greatly excited about this. The thrilling tales told me by the old Waiho miners were fresh in my memory and to have Arthur for a companion on such an expedition was all I could wish for. Time seemed very slow in passing, but at last the day arrived for us to set off. I was surprised by the precipitous nature of the country. We relayed fifty-pound swags to the Burster Camp and then climbed over it to explore a crevice Arthur had noticed previously.

Then, a couple of days later and further up the little-known valley, he began to collect logbook experience: a deep, narrow and boulder-filled gorge, whose rocks were thickly coated with ice and hoarfrost; then two days of heavy rain; then a violent storm that blew away their tent ... the Callery River in high flood ... their bridge washed away, cutting off their retreat ... and their food supply low. Finally, a difficult escape over the Burster Range: 'We descended the western side which at first was very steep. In places we were forced to hang on to scrub or tussock and lower ourselves down.'

We are only up to page 34. The eighteen-year-old is still prospecting for gold. What an apprenticeship! His full spiritual awareness of the mountains and his love of mountaineering come later.

At the age of twenty-five, Graham became an assistant guide at The Hermitage. The year was 1903, there was no telephone, and 'as it was convenient to know the number of guests arriving by coach beforehand, pigeons were used for communication'.

He already possessed a flair for working with people; someone in authority had recognised in him the more intangible elements of the art of guiding, the 'soft skills' and 'metaskills' that North American academics rediscovered in the 1980s. Straightaway he

began to extend and refine these artful ways. He learnt the subtle touches not from a lecturer with a doctorate, but from an older guide:

It was remarkable to me how Jack Clarke [the Chief Guide] made an ordinary trip so interesting. His party often included overseas visitors and I listened to him pointing out and explaining objects of interest they would otherwise have overlooked. He had a way of making people seeing the Hochstetter Icefall for the first time feel they had accomplished something quite unique in making the trip.

Most present-day mountaineers would empathise with Peter Graham on the craft of alpine climbing, the so-called hard skills:

There was much to learn; weather conditions, snow conditions, what was safe and what wasn't. Arthur Woodham [a gold-prospecting companion] had taught me a lot, and Jack Clarke taught me a great deal. I did not want to make any mistakes. I read and re-read Fitzgerald's book, Green's, and my favourite, Mannering's *With Axe and Rope in the New Zealand Alps*. This seemed to express what I felt about the mountains and I followed the author's experiences with great interest.

Here, too, are the ordinary days of the young apprentice, varying from carrying huge loads over rough country, to:

Then I took the others out for picnics each day for about a week ... My duties were to carry the lunch, boil the billy, and hand round the sandwiches.

He gradually acquires that priceless commodity, local knowledge:

I knew very little about the Alps apart from the Callery, the Fox, and the Copland Valley areas, and the first thing given me was a map. This I studied very carefully, memorising as many details as I could.

Also, Graham tells us about the client-from-hell. (Several of them, actually, and mostly from England.) Every present-day instructor and guide would recognise the near-miss involving Jimmy Smith (one of Graham's fellow-guides) and Lady A, a determined

but overambitious and hopelessly unfit client. Lady A barely survived a storm on the Tasman Glacier and an unplanned bivouac. Even back then, in 1903, there was paperwork:

Head Office wrote requesting an explanation and Clarke had to send a full report in which he attempted to exonerate Smith. The official view [in Wellington] was that Smith had allowed his party to override his better judgment and this should not have happened. There was to be no recurrence. This was an early lesson for me and one which I remembered.

This early lesson was one in that most critical and intangible of all qualities: judgment. Here is another story illustrating judgment, a revealing account from an ascent of Mount Cook in 1905:

Time was getting short, and a narrow icy ridge lay immediately ahead of us. Clarke [the chief guide] took the lead and before commencing to cut steps he turned to the party and said, 'Now we shall have to consider whether we should go on or turn back – if we go on, there is every chance of our having to spend the night out, which is not advisable; if we turn back we shall no doubt be able to get off the mountain before darkness.'

The Doctor said, 'Well, Clarke, we will leave that to you.'

Jack [Clarke] said, 'I don't think that is quite fair.'

However, the Doctor repeated, 'No, we will leave it to you Clarke, you are the leader.'

Jack did not hesitate very long, but without answering started to cut steps up the ridge. No sooner had he begun when there was a spontaneous and united cheer from the rest of us

...

This was a gentlemanly exchange, true to period; notice, though, where the buck stopped.

At that time crampons had not come into widespread use. Even though guides were renowned for feats of endurance wielding their ice-axes, step-cutting was very slow. The critical factor in the decision to continue was the weather. A mild night featured decisively.

A down-to-earth read. A modest man, with a sense of humour. A lesson in leadership, simple and straightforward, but not shallow. Uplifting. I loved this scrap of dialogue, a parting remark from his friend and client, Dr Teichelmann: ‘You know, Peter, this mountaineering – it’s a bug – it “gets” you doesn’t it?’

7. Outdoor education – textbook’s fashionable aims bias

O Measurement, O Measurement!

Now, where were we? We were looking at progress and its attendant issues. Scroll forward to the present day. Zoom in from ‘our industry’ to ‘outdoor education’. Reopen *Effective Leadership*, because we haven’t yet finished with that groovy modern text. Hmm ... we are now in the territory of Education Outdoors New Zealand (EONZ). A snag of writing for NZOIA is that one occasionally finds oneself straying onto EONZ matters. But *Effective Leadership* overlays the domains of both organisations. The book could help NZOIA and EONZ to more clearly define their territories.

Did I say ‘progress’? I should have added that whenever you use the word ‘progress’ in an education context, it is wise to also have ready the word ‘fashion’.

Behind the harmless word ‘effective’, in the book’s title, lurks a premise about outdoor educators’ aims: an assumption that all outdoor educators want to improve people *in some measurable way*. On the first page of the Preface, for example, we read about a high-school PE class using an indoor climbing-wall. We find no mention of the joy of moving on rock or of youthful exuberance, but we read about ‘self-efficacy building techniques’. This is an implicit aims bias that may not be obvious to all readers, and ‘self-efficacy’ is technical language, and we haven’t even reached page 1 of the book. ‘What is it about sociology’, wrote Russell Wayne Baker, the US newspaper columnist, ‘that instantly bogs us down in fens of jargon?’ Then we read about a debriefing, after the climbing-wall session, that emphasises ‘how they might apply their new-found confidence to school and home situations in the future’. On the aims of outdoor education, therefore, for all the book’s exhaustive thoroughness, much of it comes across as a one-horse, one-course message, irritatingly biased towards

graphable outcomes and particularly outcomes in social and personal development. This bias reflects the enthusiasms of the authors and of many teachers – but not of all teachers. It also reflects fashion. This fashion has already reached New Zealand, where outdoor educators are presently engrossed in bureaucratic goals. I was pleased to see outdoor ed included in New Zealand's health-and-physical-education curriculum, but it is a shame that now, as well as looking forward to our rockclimbing, we also have to look backwards for the ERO, while wondering how to compute the pleasure of balancing on small toeholds.

There is a sense in which all education, of whatever type, changes people. But in the context of mainstream outdoor education, I myself don't like to concentrate on changing people in a prescriptive and tabulable way. I avoid such a focus, as I avoid punch-ups and religion. Overemphasis on quantifiable educational outcomes marginalises and weakens outdoor ed's other main strands. I am what can loosely be called a traditionalist, and I'm proud of it. I will never see a tent as primarily a tool to change people in a way that can be graphed. For me, the warm rock will never become subservient to a more major goal of quantifying benefits. A part of outdoor education lies above and beyond curriculums. No words adequately describe the beauty of a rising sun. 'The ablest pens have failed, and I think must always fail, to give a true idea of the grandeur of the Alps,' wrote Edward Whymper. What would you write in a syllabus? 'Level 5, Strand D, Intermediate-level awe and wonder'?

So *Effective Leadership* is not my sort of book. In fact, I have only been able to endure a page or two at a time; I have had to dilute each chapter with Jim Perrin's essays from *On and Off the Rocks*, swilling the fatty words from my mind and tasting, instead, some lean storytelling.

But *Effective Leadership* is here to stay, a benchmark text and probably, in the eyes of arch-experientialists, the definitive reference on good practice. So bear in mind this: New Zealand arguably lags slightly behind the United States regarding the high-theory of outdoor leadership, and, unfortunately, in the country of the blind, the one-eyed immigrants are kings. Read this book discerningly and glimpse the possible future reservedly. New Zealand is not an American outpost. Make up your own mind whether, for

outdoor education, measurable outcomes are cool. Or might they be, in some circumstances, the results of voguish dogma? Do we really have to tack the word 'assessment' onto every paragraph that contains 'Otago Central Rail Trail'? Are four-page health-disclosure forms a 'reasonable and prudent' precaution or are they American tosh? Be sceptical. Be quarrelsome. Be independent. Accept and reject, as appropriate. Discard inflated bullshit. Get angry. Go for a run.

Yes, go for a run or bang your tennis-racket on the ground, and mull over, if you will, facilitation, apparently an essential part of outdoor education. Facilitation is also known as debriefing, or reviewing, or processing the experience. The terminology begs the question, When does traditional, common-sense debriefing become facilitation? The answer: when you need a book to learn how to do it.

Priest and Gass classify facilitation as a soft skill and seem to consider the tedious reflection to be a cornerstone of outdoor education. Its purpose is 'to augment the qualities of the adventure experience based on an accurate assessment of the client's [or pupil's] needs'. But the large section on facilitation is, for me, the epicentre of their book, holding the potential to spread damage throughout mainstream outdoor ed. I dispute the place of the ritualistic get-together in mainstream outdoor education. In doing so, I belong to a seldom heard but wonderfully obstinate sprinkling of purists, who feel that contrived debriefing or 'processing' radically affects the spirit of mainstream outdoor ed and fundamentally alters the aims balance. So as I studied these chapters, I struggled to maintain my composure, but I kept going, hypnotised by the awfulness of it all.

Take, for example, one of the basic principles of facilitation: 'to create a supportive atmosphere, you must establish and expect clients [or schoolpupils] to follow certain ground rules'. One of these rules is 'single speaking'. For me, this artificiality would debase the informality and naturalness of mainstream outdoor education; in fact, the synthetic nature borders on the creepy.

I am the wrong side of fifty now, with wrinkles replacing the rough edges, but even as a twenty-one-year-old instructor I did not need to be told this: 'Invite quiet clients to contribute by asking

them by name, seemingly at random, but without putting them on the spot. Make gentle eye contact, lean forward, and smile invitingly.'

And so it goes on. 'Stop lengthy speakers with a polite interruption ... If repeated interruptions become necessary and seem ineffective, you can introduce the burning match constraint. Each client is given the same number of matches and may only speak for as long as one match keeps burning'.

In case any readers try this technique, we should note (and I am assuming this, not quoting it) that the skilful facilitator will re-establish occasional eye contact, while not losing sight of the burning match – for there's a safety concern here – and at a crucial point will lean forward and say politely, 'Stop talking now, please, (name of participant)'.

This theatrical apparatus, then, is the way to enlightenment. I am reminded of the riddle: 'How many Californians does it take to change a light bulb? Four. One to screw in the bulb and three to share the experience.'

Perhaps a quote from my own book, *Climbing Lessons*, would illustrate the bad old days, before the coming of facilitation: 'I haven't been the kids' moral guardian, though I might have growled once or twice. I've accepted them for what they are and never been anything except what I am, and we have understood each other. Nor have I delved into or prodded and winkled out every nuance and foible of their young characters. Nor poked my nose into their innermost feelings. My way has been a hands-off one, merely to get them to look, to open their eyes to the morning mist.'

The debate over facilitation centres on the relative importance of different aims and on the overall aims-balance. So wide are the aims of mainstream outdoor education that they will accommodate both traditionalists and those who would facilitate kids to death. Yet can the traditionalist and the facilitator work in harmony on the same school camp?

I doubt it. There's a philosophical divide, and people hold strong opinions, for and against facilitation. Phlegmatic detachment is rare. There is no win-win middle ground; even if there were, outdoor educators are idealists, unwilling to compromise with

fellow idealists. The coalition would be precarious. The different, contrasting leaders would need to understand each other very well.

Which brings me digressively to this: an annoyance of *Effective Leadership* is that you can't get under the skin of the two authors. Unlike outdoor leaders, they stay at arm's-length. In Simon Priest, a prolific writer on adventurous activities, we seem to have a man who would extricate himself from avalanche debris and then pause to calculate probabilities to two decimal places. Slightly droidish, hey? Carried away by the glitter and excitement of Form 5 mathematics? I guess we could classify this as The Cerebral Approach, in our Avalanche Rescue Paradigm. An alternative label would be The F—g Ludicrous Approach, because his calm application of mental arithmetic during an avalanche rescue (page 277–8) is a quantitative flight of fancy that deserves exasperated derision. It's academic fanaticism, rooted in campus insularity. I could accept this sort of approach if it came out of a NASA control-room, but applied to an avalanche rescue it is farcical.

Yet in a couple of places in the book, Dr Priest nearly becomes human: there is a hint of fatherly tolerance towards the traditionalists, the romantics, like me, who would let the mountains speak for themselves ... A lost cause ... retro aims ... ignore them ... they'll grow up eventually.

And Dr Gass, what sort of a fella is he? What sort of a day out would I get with Mike? Would I understand him? Is he bilingual? I mean, does he speak English, too? I would hope so, because if he were to follow his rule of thumb, taking into account that I am an adult and am not, I don't think, intellectually challenged (page 178), then he and I would 'spend equal amounts of time doing and discussing'. Sensational.

Here and there, in *Effective Leadership*, an exclamation mark prompts you to smile. But the book is not one to which I would return to relive a laugh, because I read it all without scenting any real wit. To plough through its passionless seriousness is to suffer a peculiarly mental form of man's inhumanity to man. I've had more fun from computer manuals. I feel privileged to have got into outdoor education before the theorists arrived. A book

like *Effective Leadership* might have crushed all the spontaneity and naturalness out of me, and could have swept the joy out of the job.

These things turn full circle. The traditionalists' time will come. There are more traditionalists in mainstream education than this book would lead you to believe. The average teacher, when he or she gets back to the campsite at 5.00pm, is too knackered to bother with Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive objectives. For the time being, however, the RAMS is mandatory; we are coerced into measurable outcomes and the assessment of them; facilitation is forced upon us. Inexorably, our outdoor education, once wholly different from school, is becoming just like school. Deep into the bush, we discover imposed curriculums, accreditation methods, 'accountability', and 'effectiveness'. We must justify. Our independence and professionalism are eroded. Discretion is taken from us. We are dispossessed.

The analogy with the pre-Reformation church, hinted at earlier, is strained but still useful. Luther preached the doctrine of justification by faith rather than by works. Similarly, we traditionalists, we poor misguided savages, justify outdoor education by believing in it rather than by theorising on it. We have not yet been horsewhipped for our feeble-mindedness, but we are smugly ignored by many textbook-writers and aims-listers, some of whom have a vested interest in the existence of the high-theory. So we are left to fade away, which - praise be to pig-headedness - we refuse to do.

Maybe it's hopeless, making climbers into outdoor educators. We care too much. And maybe it was a mistake to capture outdoor ed and cage it in the national curriculum. Maybe outdoor education would be better-off back where it started: outside the bars of state intervention, free from academic tyranny, and uncorrupted by the mystique of trademarked models.

8. Apprenticeship

A week after noticing the Lincoln University advertisement, I spotted another advert concerning outdoor leadership, from a different corner of our industry:

From a drawing by A D McCormick,
from *Climbs in the New Zealand Alps*,
E A Fitzgerald, 1896.



A SLIP.

'An amusing incident occurred at the start, Clark again being
the chief actor ...'

Whenua Iti Outdoor Pursuits Centre
Adventure Leadership Training

Adventure leadership is a nine-month course accelerating you towards your goal in the outdoors.

We are an outdoor pursuits centre specialising in working with at-risk students who want to get into the outdoor industry and have a strong interest and background in the outdoors or [an interest in] personal development linked to the outdoors.

Does this sound like you?

... you will work towards national qualifications and outdoor instructor awards.

So, on the one hand, our industry now has its emergent thinkerati, busily conquering range upon range of demanding literature. On the other hand, we have at-risk citizens, plucked out of New Zealand's new and growing underclass and put in charge of raftloads of fun-seekers.

That's clever. That's Kiwi ingenuity and pragmatism. A mental somersault. I commend Whenua Iti for its taking at-risk people off the streets. One of my mates in the Far North has lost three cars to at-risk adventurers; he'll be interested to hear that these guys might now be in Motueka, studying risk management. Seriously, though, I praise Whenua Iti and SFRITO for their joint initiative to provide on-the-job training. The sociological perspective is only one of several routes to outdoor leadership. You can quite quickly become an effective single-pitch supervisor without ever studying models, even if some unwitting propagandists would bamboozle you into believing otherwise; Pete Graham coped well without an adaptive dissonance model, for the chicken *can* come before the egg.

Apprenticeship is a sound way to pick up and cultivate the craft and craftiness of outdoor leadership, though we should also acknowledge that some natural talents – especially those that could be vaguely termed 'people skills' – are laid down, or not laid down, before a person enters kindergarten. They are a part of his or her personality. But Whenua Iti is on the right track. Necessity is an affective mother of leadership, provided that the technical skills are already in place, plus some muscular strength and

hardiness. Given common sense, practical intelligence, and sensitivity to fairly deep and complex feelings, the graduates of Whenua Iti might manage without Hersey-Blanchard's Situational Leadership™ model.

Each of these young leaders will need integrity and passion. But what about purpose? Critically, each of these leaders will also need to understand that our industry encompasses a huge range of aims. 'Effective leadership' can have no meaning without clear purpose. Earlier I referred to the person-changers. Among outdoor educators, as distinct from leaders who work in adventure tourism or in outdoor recreation, wishing to change people in a quantifiable way is a legitimate and common goal. But it is not the only goal. For some of us, me included, measurable change is a spin-off; it is seldom a priority. I object to having it presumed of me or imposed upon me as an overriding goal, the Ace of Aims.

Yet the presumers and imposers are everywhere. London's *Times Educational Supplement* recently published a feature on outdoor education (9 July 1999). Regrettably for a normally authoritative newspaper, it gave us Peter Bunyan of University College, Chichester, writing – in a commissioned article, not in an advert – as though outdoor education had penetrated a British university for the first time: 'But if adventurous experience is to feed through into personal growth, proper support is vital, which is why University College Chichester is launching the United Kingdom's first single honours degree in adventure education'. Strictly speaking, regarding the use of the label 'adventure education', he's no doubt correct, but the statement does rather overlook a number of existing, similar degrees and thirty years of postgrad studies at other British universities.

Peter Bunyan, an ideological soulmate of Messrs Priest and Gass, goes on: 'While outdoor education centres have traditionally been good at developing physical techniques, such as paddling a canoe, they have been less successful at imparting less tangible skills – increasing self-esteem, teamwork or decision-making. Instructors often assume benefits will accrue through some form of osmosis, as though all someone has to do is to take part.'

Hold on! Do I detect a whiff of censorious sarcasm? Or intellectual snobbery? No, we'll give him the benefit of the doubt; either these two sentences are an opportune simplification or they are sloppy writing. A complex ambiguity hides behind his twin accusations.

His first complaint, alleging a lack of success at imparting less tangible skills, should have been prefaced by acknowledging that many outdoor centres (or outdoor educators) do not want to focus overmuch on increasing self-esteem, teamwork, or decision-making. This is not to say that such centres ignore these areas; they see them as merely a part of a much wider whole. But Peter Bunyan's perspective seems not to recognise kayaking for kayaking's sake. By omission, it renounces the mountains for their own sake. The tide is flowing this way; this is the new orthodoxy; this is current theory, deceptively attractive to innovative educationists and to preachy busybodies; we are no longer allowed simply to have a good day out.

His second complaint, alleging an assumption that benefits will accrue through some form of osmosis, is a veiled but bossy call for routine facilitation.

Both complaints seem to dismiss intuition, as regards judging the worth of an experience. Intuition, incidentally, does not mean no thinking; on the contrary, the gut feeling or sixth sense often demands hard, sustained thinking. But instinctive knowledge is not a popular notion in the knowledge-based economy. I suppose that the value of living together – the rich residential experience – was all just imaginary.

Criticism of past ways is the stuff of progress, but Peter Bunyan is merely mouthing the mantra of experiential education, a discipline concerned mainly with social and personal development; he is not speaking for traditional outdoor education, a field – maybe a religion – in which simply taking part can be the most wonderful thing on earth.

*

We have had 70 millimetres of rain in three days, but this afternoon a southerly change has broken the cloud and whitened the upper slopes of Mount Cargill. The forecast is for a clear and frosty night. A new pair of Reeboks is waiting. This evening I will

christen them. I won't pause to sing a doxology, but, while pondering on where outdoor education appears to be heading, I might stop briefly to howl at the moon.

Things might not of course be so bad as I've made out. The New Zealand bush is far removed from the rarefied opining of *The Times Educational Supplement*. Out there, where it matters, our outdoor leaders might not yet be blinded by a surfeit of education. Out there, physical action and long days are what get the juices going. Out there, we can fight a guerrilla war to keep outdoor education different. But forewarned is forearmed. Back at the office, we might need to employ some pragmatic deviousness and some compliant hypocrisy.

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