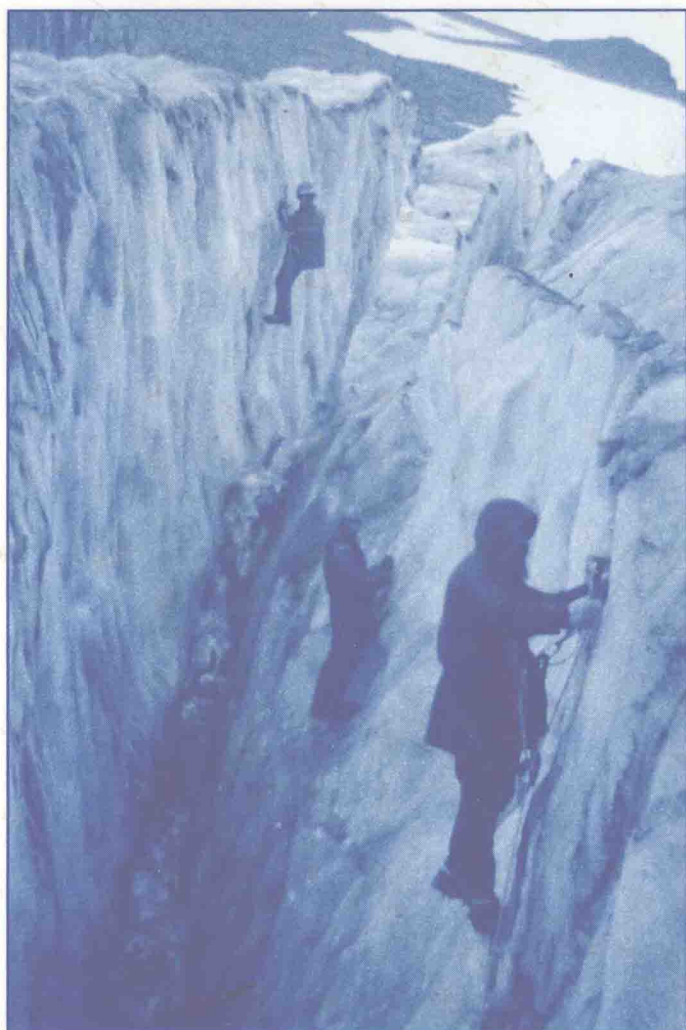


# **OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PURSUITS:**

**Foundations, Models, and Theories**



**Alan W. Ewert**

# **OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PURSUITS:**

**FOUNDATIONS, MODELS, AND THEORIES**

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# **OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PURSUITS:**

**FOUNDATIONS, MODELS, AND THEORIES**

# PREFACE

This book is an outgrowth of three classes I have taught at Ohio State University and my experience as an Outward Bound instructor since 1977. The three classes taught were the "Foundations of Outdoor Adventure," "Models and Theories in Outdoor Pursuits," and "Research Methods and Findings in Outdoor Pursuits." My practical experience, coupled with the academic orientation of the university setting, seemed well suited to more formally describe the processes and foundations of the outdoor adventure pursuits profession. The profession has grown from one of school camps and Boy Scouts to one of a multifaceted industry with offerings in adventure travel, personal growth, and group development.

The goal of this book is to provide a source of information that can be used by a variety of people with differing levels of expertise in the outdoor adventure pursuits field, from both academic and practitioner communities. This book is designed to provide a more scholarly approach to a field in which, heretofore, there has been relatively little formalized writing. Consequently, its orientation is highly theoretical and research-based. Numerous references and citations have been included, presenting a thorough scholarship of information and conceptual thought. It is hoped that the researcher, practitioner, and academic person in outdoor adventure pursuits will find this book a useful asset in his or her present endeavors. It is also expected that the readers will use the concepts and theories presented as a basis to further expand their own beliefs and ideas based on their personal experiences and training. Moreover, the book will have served its purpose if the researcher or graduate student gains new ideas for future research or conduct from its contents.

The time has come for the profession of outdoor adventure pursuits to assume a more formal and clearly delineated role in the education and recreation of our society. Outdoor adventure pursuits are not activities solely for the daredevil but, rather, they are legitimate educational and leisure pursuits in which a broad spectrum of people can participate. While not just an end in themselves, outdoor adventure pursuits can be powerful agents of individual and social change. It is toward this end that the book, *Outdoor Adventure Pursuits: Foundations, Models, and Theories*, has been written in order to better understand the outdoor adventure pursuits phenomenon.

Alan Ewert, Ph.D  
1988

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing a book on any subject is both a privilege and a great challenge. This is particularly true with a topic such as outdoor adventure pursuits. This is true, in part, because of the “newness” of the field and the relative lack of other literary guidelines. On the other hand, this lack of precedent has also led to a sense of greater freedom and liberty. Rather oddly, I wish to first acknowledge my appreciation at having this relative freedom and feel it reflects the openness and lack of dogmatism that this field has avoided so far.

Two institutional settings have contributed to the conceptualization and formation of this book. First, the Ohio State University has provided the resources, time, and encouragement to follow through with this project. Second, Outward Bound has afforded me the opportunity to observe, learn, and experience the unique world of the outdoor adventure instructor. Both the academic and experiential settings have greatly contributed to my sense of having something to say.

From a personal perspective there have been many people “involved” in the writing of this book. For their professional help and encouragement, my thanks to Dr. Charles Mand (Ohio State University), Victor Walsh (Pacific Crest Outward Bound), and Nils Anderson (Publishing Horizons).

In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Dan Dustin (San Diego State University) and Dr. Steve Hollenhorst (West Virginia University), both of whom kindly consented to review the initial drafts of the manuscript. In addition, Steve helped me keep a semblance of sanity by continuing to lead the crux pitches while I belayed the rope during our climbing adventures.

I am especially grateful to my wife, Alison, for she not only acted as editor and reviewer but also was one I could turn to for bouncing ideas off of and providing the personal encouragement that only a person you love can.

# DEDICATION

This book is about outdoor adventure pursuits. It would seem fitting that it should be dedicated to individuals who in some way are or have been involved in the promotion of those peculiar types of activities. With this in mind I've dedicated the book to three groups.

First, to my parents, Walter and Florence, for providing an upbringing that led to a love of the outdoor environment. This love was translated into hunting and fishing trips and adventurous expeditions up the Eau Claire river in a rowboat.

Second, I would like to dedicate this book to my friend and fellow adventurer, Dr. James Black. Jim lived his life as an adventure and shared his vision of adventure and its meaning in contemporary life to many of us—his past friends and students. Jim was killed in September of 1986 and I lost a good friend and outdoor adventure pursuits lost an articulate doer and supporter of adventure-based living. Here's to you, Jim!

Finally, no book on outdoor adventuring would be complete without an acknowledgment of the wondrous work done by the outdoor instructor. So, I'd also like to dedicate this book to all the outdoor instructors who, despite rain, cold, loneliness, and irate students, manage to pull off high-quality and safe courses that provide our society with powerful and positive learning experiences.

Alan W. Ewert  
April 1988

# FOREWORD

What is it that best describes a civilized society? In the United States, a concern for the health and safety of the citizenry is certainly near the top of the list. Since the Great Depression of the 1930's, good government has been equated with the protection of individuals from a whole host of catastrophic events. This "insurance mentality," as author George Leonard describes it, has contributed to numerous laws and lawsuits designed to immunize the American public from the sting of life's hard blows. Accordingly, the good life has come to be interpreted more and more as the safe life, the comfortable life, the predictable life.

How strange, then, that in the midst of this cultural climate there should appear a heightened interest in the deliberate pursuit of danger, discomfort, and unpredictability in the form of outdoor adventure pursuits. What is it about outdoor adventurers that accounts for their "swimming against the tide" of our societal preoccupation with safety? What is it about their psychological makeup that doesn't set well with the trend toward a more stable and secure way of living? What needs of theirs are going unmet? What motivates them? What are the rewards of their involvement?

In this book, Alan Ewert draws on his wealth of personal and professional experience in the field of outdoor adventure pursuits, his research on the topic, and his interpretation of others' research, to give us a better understanding of the outdoor adventurer. Such understanding is critical not only for those who are responsible for planning outdoor recreation opportunities, but also for those who desire to know what it is about the larger culture that outdoor adventurers find so unappealing.

In the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell predicted the failure of a society characterized by warmth, comfort, and the absence of strain. That society would fail because however appetizing on the surface, once bitten into it would be inherently distasteful to a human being. Could it be that the increasing popularity of outdoor adventure pursuits is evidence of Orwell's contention? Could it be that sanctioning opportunities for risk-taking and adventure is also the mark of a civilized society?

Daniel L. Dustin, Professor  
Department of Recreation  
San Diego State University



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Ewert currently holds a position with the U.S. Forest Service as a Supervisory Research Social Scientist. He is also an Adjunct Professor at Ohio State University where he teaches courses in Models and Theories in Outdoor Pursuits, Research and Evaluation in Outdoor Pursuits, and Outdoor Pursuits: Issues and Foundations. Dr. Ewert received his Ph.D. from the University of Oregon and has worked as a mountaineering ranger and resource management specialist for the U.S. Park Service. Most recently, he was the Director of Professional Development for Pacific Crest Outward Bound where he still acts as a staff trainer and course facilitator.

In addition to his professional interests in outdoor pursuits and outdoor recreation issues, Dr. Ewert is involved in mountaineering, rock climbing, spelunking, backcountry skiing, SCUBA, ice climbing, and sea-kayaking. These interests have included both personal involvement and instructing. He has been fortunate to participate in outdoor adventures in North America, Canada, Alaska, Mexico, South America, Nepal, and Tibet.

He has published in a number of journals including the journals of *Leisure Research*, *Environmental Education*, *Experiential Education*, *Response*, *Camping Magazine*, *Forestry*, *Underseas Journal*, *Adventure Journal*, and *Leisure Sciences*. He is also a member of the American Alpine Club, American Mountain Guides Association, Sierra Club, and International Wilderness Institute.

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# **OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PURSUITS: AN INTRODUCTION**

In 1906, an advertisement appeared in the London Times:

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.

What is extraordinary about this announcement is not that it reads like an assumption of risk form, but rather that over 5,000 people applied for the 30 positions available. Seventy-eight years later, in 1984, another ad appeared in the Los Angeles Times announcing the search for one woman to learn and participate in a SCUBA diving expedition. The advertisement read:

**\*\*WANTED: A YEAR OF YOUR LIFE FOR THE ADVENTURE OF YOUR LIFE**

Once again thousands of people applied. Honor and recognition notwithstanding, the underlying thread linking these two seemingly unrelated incidents is the quest for ADVENTURE. This search has carried over into educational and recreational delivery systems. Adventure activities such as backpacking, mountain-climbing, white-water rafting, and SCUBA are becoming increasingly popular forms of human endeavor. Support systems, such as adventure centers, training programs, and certification schemes, have developed around these activities. This chapter discusses outdoor adventure from the perspective of definitions, the nature of the adventure experience, and how it relates to other areas and disciplines.



SCUBA has become an increasingly popular outdoor adventure pursuit for millions of people.

## OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

In contemporary society, the term *outdoor adventure* generally implies an educational or recreational activity that is exciting and physically challenging. It was the Chinese, however, who first successfully encapsulated the true essence of adventuring by their term "**wei-jan**." Translated as opportunity through danger, wei-jan incorporates many of the reasons for participating in the outdoor adventure. Outdoor adventure affords the participant the opportunity to experience the excitement and personal involvement in an outdoor setting which is often lacking in our traditional recreational or educational systems.

Various terms have been used to describe the outdoor adventure experience. These terms include: adventure recreation, high adventure, natural challenge activities, outdoor pursuits, and risk recreation. Several definitions have evolved to describe this form of activity:

- Any number of leisure pursuits which provide exposure to physical danger. (Meier, 1978, p. 33)
- All pursuits that provide an inherently meaningful human experience that relates directly to a particular outdoor environment—air, water, hills, mountains, . . . (Darst and Armstrong, 1980, p. 3)
- Activities which involve human participation as a response to the challenge offered primarily by the physical, natural world such as

hills, air currents, and waves. (Progen, 1979, p. 237)

- Outdoor activities involving the natural environment where the outcome perceived by the participants is unknown. (Yerkes, 1985)

In defining outdoor adventure pursuits, a number of components must be considered. First and most obvious, outdoor adventure pursuits involve an interaction with the natural environment. Second, this interaction requires an element of risk to which the participant is exposed by engaging in the activity. This risk can be physical, emotional, or material, but is usually associated with the possibility of being injured or even killed. This deliberate inclusion of risk in a recreational or educational framework helps distinguish outdoor adventure pursuits from more traditional outdoor recreation and/or outdoor education activities.

## **ADVENTURE AND RISK TAKING**

Although some may view the deliberate seeking of risk as dangerous and foolhardy, risk taking is the sine qua non of the adventure experience. As Miles (1978) suggests, one cannot enjoy the view without the risk of passage. Past studies have indicated that climbers actively maintain a level of uncertainty by changing the "rules of engagement" (how a particular mountain or rock can be climbed) or the level of difficulty and danger (Emerson, 1966). For example, an experienced climber may climb in the winter or alone in order to increase the difficulty and danger to desired levels.

This is not, however, risk dictated solely by chance or fate. The outcome, while uncertain and not completely controllable, can be influenced by the participant. Risk, or the threat of physical and/or emotional harm, emerges when there is a loss of control or predictability. Control becomes an important factor in distinguishing between something that is difficult and something that is foolhardy.

No true mountaineer ever courted danger for its own sake. The whole point of any sport is that it demands the acquisition of a special skill which cancels the danger. It was the mountaineer's justification that he climb by routes where his skill in mountaineering, supported by courage and resolution of no mean order, made him competent to ascend and descend safely. (Stowell, 1967, p. 12)

This factor of control was more recently supported in a study by Ewert (1985) on climbers at Mt. Rainier. The climbers indicated that opportunity to express control over their lives and their immediate situation was an important motivation for climbing. This sense of control became even more important as the individual climber gained experience and expertise. Houston (1968) states that "experienced climbers understand, enjoy, and seek risk because it presents a difficulty to overcome



Mountaineering, like most outdoor adventure pursuits, demands both physical and technical skills.

and can be estimated and controlled. He equally abhors danger because it is beyond his control" (p. 56).

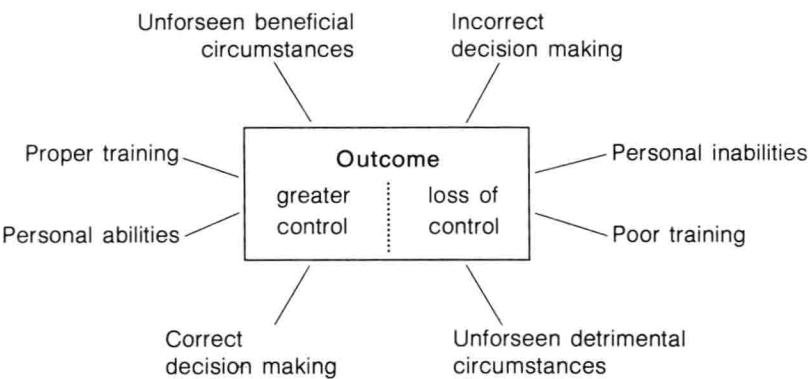
A permutation on this theme of danger is the differentiation between real and apparent risk. Mortlock (1983), an early advocate of this distinction, posits that, while real risk is common to the recreational outcome of outdoor adventure pursuits, apparent risk is more often used in educational or structured classes of outdoor adventuring activities. *Real risk* is that which actually exposes the participant to the possibility, even probability, of being hurt or having a close call. *Apparent risk* refers to the "illusion" of danger or the possibility of being injured. Outdoor instructors are usually encouraged to promote activities, such as top-roped rock climbing, that have a substantial degree of apparent risk but a low degree of real risk.

As previously stated, risk, or the threat of physical and emotional harm, emerges when there is a loss of control over the outcome of a particular activity. Within the outdoor environment, this loss of control can be aggravated by personal weakness, poor or incorrect decision making, and unforeseen circumstances. Conversely, personal abilities, correct decision making, and technology can serve to create a heightened sense of control. Figure 1.1 illustrates the interaction of these and other components in the outcome of an adventure experience.

For educational purposes this [adventure] is the most important stage



**FIGURE 1.1**  
*Influencing Factors on the Outcome of a Risk Activity*



in the activity. Its validity is acceptable only if there is virtually no real danger for most pupils. As adventure is a state of mind it is possible for a pupil to experience adventure in an environment of apparent rather than real danger. As long as he feels the situation is dangerous, in the sense that a mistake or lack of effort on his part could lead to some sort of physical harm or unpleasant situation, then he may experience adventure in the fullest sense of the word (Mortlock, 1978).

Supporting the concept of real versus apparent danger can be demonstrated by the ropes course. A ropes course usually consists of a series of obstacles constructed from ropes, wooden beams, and cables suspended in trees and poles. Participants seek to negotiate the obstacles by themselves or in pairs. The participants are usually belayed from the ground or attached to a safety cable to prevent falling to the ground. Many ropes courses combine these high rope obstacles with initiative tasks such as the "wall" (scaling a 12 to 15 foot wall), or "electric fence" (crossing over an invisible wire four to six feet off the ground). While one could argue that the ropes course does not offer a true adventure experience, it does offer an excellent example of how apparent danger can be used to achieve certain outcomes.

**DEFINING OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PURSUITS**

It would appear that the outdoor adventure experience is made up of a number of components, including an interaction with the natural environment, the perception of risk or danger, and a concomitant sense of uncertainty of the outcome. Given these factors, outdoor adventure pursuits may be defined as: