

The Genesis of Outward Bound

by Anthony Richards



photo credits: www.MarkZelinski.com

This is an unabridged version of the introduction to *Outward Bound The Inward Odyssey* Vol. II by Mark Zelinski. Dr. Anthony Richards is a retired professor from Dalhousie University and is currently a consultant for Outward Bound International. He resides in Nova Scotia, Canada. E-mail: anthony@hotmail.com

Outward Bound is an innovative educational idea put forth by Kurt Hahn that has survived and flourished for more than sixty years. This is truly remarkable because so many educational fads have come and gone in this period. Is it that the concept is so adaptable that it can be applied to many settings or that the rationale and philosophy is timeless and has a universal appeal? The creator, Kurt Hahn, is no longer present but his influence within Outward Bound and other educational initiatives is still very much alive. He was a man who had a unity of purpose without a unity of focus which, in part, accounts for the versatility and adaptability of the programs. Outward Bound was no exception to these tenets and was born out of some unusual and somewhat serendipitous circumstances.

Hahn's Early Life

Kurt Hahn was born in Germany in 1886, the son of a wealthy Jewish industrialist, but he lived much of his life in England as an Englishman. His father had a great affinity for England and it was through his influence and nudging that Kurt eventually studied at Oxford University and was able to "rub shoulders" with the educational elite in Britain.

However, while he was still in high school in 1902 he spent a summer vacation in the Dolomites with friends from Abbotsholme, an English public School. During this trip, in discussions about the English Public school system, the first educational seeds were sown. This led to a later obsession about education that was strongly influenced by studies of Plato, Baden Powell, Cecil Reddie, Dr Arnold of Rugby, Herman Lietz and others.

In 1904, while still a young man, Hahn suffered from a condition that put increasing pressure on his brain that caused severe headaches. This was a permanent disability over which he triumphed with the greatest courage. It was partly the long recovery periods associated with this condition that provided him with the opportunity to study educational philosophies in greater depth and formulate the system of education that he promoted throughout his life. He exemplified one of his favorite aphorisms, "your disability is your opportunity," by turning ill fortune to good purpose

Hahn was not a prolific writer. In fact most of his original writings were in the form of transcribed speeches or addresses. On several occasions he issued limited editions of a particular article or would stamp the manuscript "confidential." There appears to be no reason for this other than that he did not want his writing to be made available to the general public and then be challenged on the grounds that that the content was his definitive statement on education.

An Educational Rationale

Hahn's educational philosophy was a collage of what he considered the best ideas drawn from as many sources as possible. The result was an eclectic, "borrowed" philosophy. He was quite proud that there was nothing new about his schools and their operation. He would illustrate this with a story of the distinguished American who, while being shown around Salem School, asked Hahn's colleague, Prince Max von Baden, what he was most proud of in the school. The Prince's reply was to the effect that nothing was original and that they had borrowed from all sorts of other educators and institutions. The American expressed the view that surely all schools should aim at being original. Prince Max quickly replied: In education, as in medicine, you must harvest the wisdom of a thousand years. If you ever come across a surgeon and he wants to extract your appendix in the most original manner possible, I would strongly advise you to go to another surgeon. So it was with Hahn; he would rather use material that was already proven to work rather than experiment with something new. However, his success lay in the selection and unique combination of the principles that he decided to "borrow."

His concept of the purpose of education was simple: to develop a righteous person who is an active citizen, vigilant, and has a sense of duty to his fellow man and to God. It was his belief that every child is born with innate spiritual powers as well as with an innate ability to make correct judgments about moral issues. In the progression through adolescence the child loses these spiritual powers and the ability to make moral judgments because of, what Hahn calls, the diseased society and the impulses

of adolescence. In addition he criticized the "nerve exhausting" practices that were employed by other schools such as a lop-sided emphasis on academics and examinations. As part of his concern for physical well being he believed that every child has both a natural physical aptitude and a natural physical inaptitude. Both provide opportunities: one to develop strength and the other to overcome weakness. This was the source of another of Hahn's aphorisms, "there is more in you than you think." Hahn's goal was to provide an "ideal pasture" for these innate powers and abilities to manifest themselves.

Hahn was obsessed by the social declines or social diseases that he observed in society. These have been variously described as:

The decline in fitness due to the modern methods of locomotion.

The decline of initiative and enterprise due to the widespread disease of "spectator-itis."

The decline of memory and imagination due to the confused restlessness of modern life.

The decline of skill and care due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship.

The decline of self discipline due to the ever present availability of stimulants and tranquilizers.

The decline of compassion due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted.

These observations seem to have as much validity today as they did sixty years ago and still provide the basis for much of Outward Bound's program and content.

The County Badge

The creation of Outward Bound, as with many of Hahn's other accomplishments, was to some extent serendipitous. The vagaries of war forced Hahn to return to Germany in 1914 where he first met and worked with Prince Max von Baden. Together they were able to start a school, Schloss Salem. The rise of Hitler in the early 1930's and Hahn's outrage over Hitler's behavior resulted in imprisonment and a subsequent exile to Britain. It was here that he was asked to put on a compelling demonstration of the Salem system. At first he refused to do this in an established English Public school because it would be too difficult to overcome the inertia of tradition! He was strongly attracted to the northeast of Scotland, where he had convalesced while recovering from his sunstroke related episodes. During these recovery periods Hahn became friendly with the Cumming family who later made available the Gordonstoun Estate for Hahn to open a school. In April, 1934, Gordonstoun school was opened with two pupils. A third pupil, Prince Philip of Greece, who later became His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, joined them in September.

By 1937 there was a full compliment of about 150 students and already Hahn was looking for ways to make his system more accessible to the youth of the village. He created a tripartite scheme whereby young people could work at developing physical skills such as running, jumping and throwing, as well as learning to live in the outdoors through an expedition, and embarking upon a hobby or project, which he referred to as the grande passion. Completion of these activities to a prescribed standard resulted in the awarding of the Moray Badge, named after the school's home county of Morayshire. It was the Moray Badge program that made Hahn's principles of education come alive and the "taste of boarding school life" more accessible.

It was not long before Hahn had dreams of expanding the Moray Badge scheme to include more than a million young people. He recruited James Hogan to further develop the County Badge that was an iteration of the Moray Badge adapted to the needs and culture of each county in England. One of the Counties was willing to adopt the scheme provided a fourth component, service, was added. Hahn at first resisted by saying that it was not appropriate to give a badge for service. Compassion was an expectation of everyone. However, he capitulated and the County Badge scheme was introduced to many counties in England in 1938. The concept of service was entrenched and has become a hallmark of Hahn's work ever since. The booklet, "The County badge or the Fourfold Achievement" was eventually published in 1942 and gave credence and an equal place for all four components that are still evident in Outward Bound today.

Between 1937 and 1940 there were several short residential courses offered to promote the County Badge. One of these was a 28 day introduction to the scheme. Having been introduced to the activities and the various expected standards, the participants were expected to follow up with the activities during the subsequent twelve months and then be tested for the badge. During these short summer school programs Hahn claimed that he was able to plant unforgettable memories, "cleanse and heal the tastes of life," and turn the boys on to training. It was important therefore, that there was some way to guarantee follow up to the experience. Unfortunately there were never enough resources to make this happen.

First Outward Bound School

In 1940 Gordonstoun School was forced to evacuate its Scottish premises and set up in Plas Dinam, Wales, which was situated some thirty miles from the coast. This distance from the ocean resulted in the loss of seamanship as an essential school activity that pained Hahn deeply. As a result he arranged to have boats sent down from Gordonstoun and moored at Aberdovey where he rented an old boarding house so that students could undergo some sea training.

During this time James Hogan's tenure with the County Badge program was coming to an end and Hahn wanted to keep him on. Hahn also had the idea of further developing the short residential courses into an ongoing training course. Laurence Holt, part owner of the Blue Funnel Shipping Company, was looking for a training program for young sailors who seemed to have lost the tenacity and fortitude needed to survive the rigors of

war and shipwreck, unlike older sailors who, because of their formative experiences on sailing ships, were more likely to survive.

Laurence Holt was interested in Hahn's ideas for addressing his problem but no money was forthcoming and Hogan's job was still in jeopardy. In Hahn's own inimitable style he sent Hogan off to Liverpool to convince Holt that a training project was essential. It was of course no more than a seed of an idea at that time. As Hogan cautiously made his presentation he improvised the details. After several retreats for private discussions, Holt finally returned to the meeting, struck the table, and made a short announcement: "We'll (the Blue Funnel Shipping Company) support you. We'll give you one thousand pounds outright. We'll buy the house and put it at your disposal and we'll lend you, without charge, the trained men you need for the nautical side of your training. How will that do you?"

This was the birth of Outward Bound. Unfortunately one of Holt's conditions was that the first course should commence on October 14, 1941, only five weeks after the offer was made! Once again James Hogan came through and the Outward Bound School was established on the coast at Aberdovey where it could be conducted on and around the sea.

Even though it was Hahn who had the original idea for the twenty eight day residential course, he was first to disclaim credit for Outward Bound. He often said that Laurence Holt was the founder. Hahn will, and should, be better remembered as the "moving spirit." The name "Outward Bound" was one offered by Holt because of the nautical connection. Hahn did not like the name and wanted to maintain the notion of the County Badge. But since Holt held the monetary trump cards Hahn acquiesced. It was not until much later that Hahn admitted that one of Outward Bound's greatest assets was its name.

The first two years of Outward Bound saw many conflicts and compromises between the educational idealism of Hahn, the pragmatic sea training requirements of Holt, and the administrative needs of Hogan. The original activities and principles of the County Badge were compromised due to the somewhat rustic environment, which rendered traditional track and field activities almost impossible. The staff provided by Laurence Holt, were temporary officers, who were more concerned about their own careers than the education of the boys. Hogan managed to hold the Outward Bound concept together, but in 1943, out of frustration, handed the reins over to Freddie Fuller. Fuller was able to tame the demands of Holt and maintain a School that was true to the original intentions of Hahn. He also, at the end of the war, was able to expand the clientele to embrace an industrial apprenticeship scheme that was the current method for providing on-the-job training. The inclusion of an Outward Bound Course in the training proved irresistible and for many years provided the backbone to Outward Bound.

The Growth of Outward Bound

In 1946 the Outward Bound Trust was established. The main purpose of the Trust was to expand the concept and create other schools. In order to do this it was important to

generate funds and bring a group of influential people onto the Board. Spencer Summers, a conservative MP, managed to facilitate this and he went on to be a driving force for Outward Bound with his undefeatable spirit and energy. Even though the Trust was somewhat independent of Hahn, it was Hahn, his connections, and his incredible powers of persuasion that made it happen.

The Outward Bound School in Eskdale, in the English Lake district, opened in 1950, with another mountain school, also in the Lake District, opening in Ullswater in 1955. These two Schools had wardens who were proven mountaineers but were above all educators. Their experience as schoolmasters had a profound influence on training boys through the mountains, rather than for the mountains. This was an essential tenet of Hahn's that had not been fully realized in the early days of Aberdovey because of the strong influence of Laurence Holt. The work done in these two schools and the support of the Trust was essential in carrying Hahn's principles forward and ensuring the longevity of Outward Bound.

The 1950's were exciting years for the Outward Bound movement. The first girl's course was held at Eskdale, the Moray Sea School received its Outward Bound charter, and new schools were opened in Africa, Germany, Australia and Devon, England. However, each school adapted its training to its particular needs and environment. It was a period of flux in the establishment of the Outward Bound essences.

One of the most contentious issues was whether badges should be awarded for performance. The original County Badge scheme called for dual standards in track and field and these were designed to be a motivating force for young people by nudging the participants to achieve goals which they thought out of their reach, an example of Hahn's aphorism, to defeat their own defeatism. However, there was also a feeling at this time that there be no testing and only participation needed to be recognized. The Trust struggled long and hard and produced several iterations of badges and awards. In the end a single badge for participation was established much to the chagrin of Kurt Hahn and James Hogan.

Other Innovations

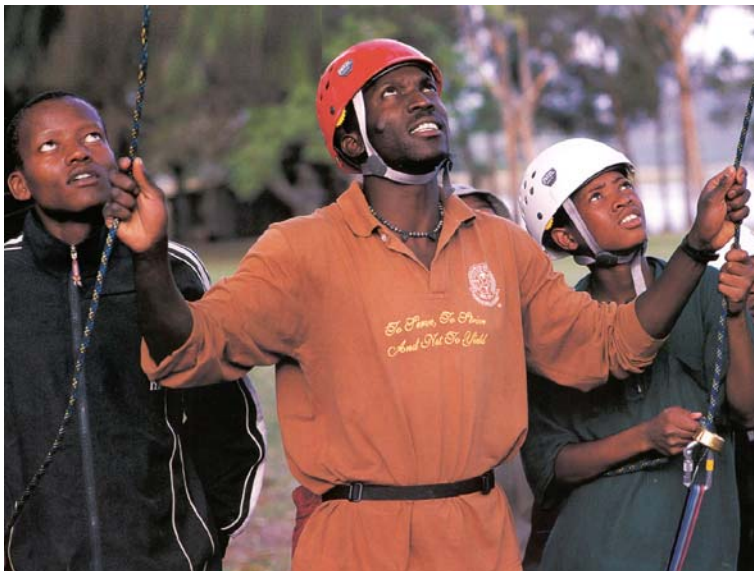
At about this time Hahn convinced the Duke of Edinburgh to endorse a scheme that was very reminiscent of the old County Badge. It was therefore not such a great loss to give up the "badges" in Outward Bound since the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme had all those elements. This exemplified Kurt Hahn's willingness to let go of one program and allow the new leadership to take control while he moved on to his next project with all the energy and educational ideas that he championed. Hahn remained on the Board of the Trust for some time but eventually became an honorary member and still perceived as the guru. He continued to challenge developments throughout the evolution of Outward Bound but never interfered. This was a prime example of his unity of purpose without a unity of focus.

When Kurt Hahn retired from Gordonstoun in 1953 it marked the beginning of a commitment to see his educational principles manifest themselves in other ways. Namely, the development of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme in 1956 and the United World College system in 1962.

The North American Connection

Another significant event in this period was the opportunity for Josh Miner to come from the United States in 1951 -52 and work at Gordonstoun as director of activities. It was during this time that he became inspired by Hahn and his work with young people. It was not long before Miner was convinced that an Outward Bound School in the United States was necessary to demonstrate Hahn's great vision. In 1962 the Colorado Outward Bound School was opened and it officially received its charter from the Trust in 1963. This paved the way for other Outward Bound Schools to be established throughout North America.

The 1960's were boom years for Outward Bound around the world. There were five new schools in the United States. Zimbabwe, New Zealand, Germany and Holland all created new schools. Rhownair in Wales was the first School for girls. In addition there was renewed energy and commitment to keep the schools current with the times. There were co-educational programs, work with youth at risk, and inner city programs as well as connections with university programs. It was a very exciting time for both staff and administrators who were enjoying the intensity and growth.



As with many innovative programs, there comes a time to pull back and reflect. Outward bound did this in the 1970s and as a result there were some closures and some consolidation of programs. However, there was still room for growth worldwide and the enthusiasm for this idealistic program flourished. There was also considerable adaptation of programs within the schools. Most of the adaptation was seen in North America. There were special courses designed and offered to corporate clients, special populations

such as recovering alcoholics, victims of abuse, adjudicated youth, women in mid life crisis, etc. This diversity of offerings was a good business plan but brought into question the integrity of the original Outward Bound program. Kurt Hahn died in 1974, and it is often said that if he were alive today he would support this diversity because he believed in adapting to do what is necessary to address the social issues of the day. However, his primary focus was always youth and their development.

Expansion and Diversity

The 1980's saw a continued growth in adapted programs. In particular changing the venue to the inner city. New York City Outward Bound became the first independently chartered urban center in the world. There were international conferences held which resulted in the formation of an International Advisory Board with regional representation and in an internationally agreed mission statement.

The 1990's began like the 1940's with the 50th Anniversary of Outward Bound fittingly celebrated at Aberdovey where it all started. Delegates from all 32 schools representing 18 countries and five continents were in attendance. This decade once again saw many changes and consolidation among programs, particularly in North America.

One of the most significant adaptations of Outward Bound could be seen as a "return from the mountain." The introduction of Expeditionary Learning resulted in taking all the wisdom of the Outward Bound process and reincorporating it into a main stream school system. The irony here is that Kurt Hahn created Outward Bound as a somewhat temporary demonstration of what he was already doing full time in his schools. Expeditionary Learning takes the short Outward Bound methodology and expands it to full time education within the school system. Greg Farrell describes it as moving from the "short course" back to the "long course."

The future of Outward Bound internationally looks very promising. However, there are still many challenges ahead. Some of them result from the rapidly changing world in which we live and the adaptations this requires. Others date back to the very genesis of Outward Bound and the County Badge. One of the original limitations of the County Badge was that it took some students many months to achieve the standards expected before being awarded a badge. When the courses were condensed into two to four week blocks it was even more difficult for young people to continue the training on their own. This may have been due to lack of facilities and instruction or merely to a lack of motivation.

In any case the issue of how to follow up students after a course has always been an issue. In fact the issue of follow up has been on almost all the agendas of the Outward Bound Trust annual meetings. While the modern day Outward Bound courses do not have the same rigid performance standards of the early days, it is still a challenge to know whether the students remain engaged in the process or not and lead a life that was influenced by the Outward Bound experience.

The social issues of today are similar in some respects and it is certainly possible to identify with Hahn's original six declines. Unfortunately the reasons for these declines may be different and the way in which the remedies are delivered are certainly different. For example, in one of the very early courses at Aberdovey a study of boys from Liverpool on board the ship were compared with a control group of boys back in the city. The results of the hard exercise and good food showed that the Outward Bound participants came home stronger, fitter and ten pounds heavier. In the time of food rationing, poor nutrition and wartime conditions this was considered to be very positive. On the other hand, today with the over consumption of fast food, hectic schedules, less day to day activity it would be logical for Outward Bound to offer the promise of a program in which you came home stronger, fitter and ten pounds lighter.

The Next Challenge

All that remains is to issue the challenge. Where does Outward Bound go from here? Hahn's frustration with the lack of follow up caused him to say "that Outward Bound can ignite . . . that is all . . . it is for to others to keep the flame alive." It may be that Outward Bound can be more pro-active in keeping the flame alive by recruiting the energy and idealism of its graduates to go on to address the social declines of today and be of service globally. In his later years, Hahn wrote:

. . . you and I would agree that indoctrination is of the devil and that it is a crime to force anybody into opinion. But I, unlike you, consider it culpable neglect not to guide and even plunge the young into experiences which are likely to present opportunities for self-discovery. If you spare the young such experiences, in deference to their wishes, you stunt their natural growth of basic human qualities which they will need for their own happiness and for the service to their fellow men.

Right up to the time he died Hahn never relented in promoting his idealistic style of education. Outward Bound as an institution has a unique opportunity to continue the work of Kurt Hahn and can position itself as a servant leader that provides young people with the opportunity and tools to make a positive difference in the world.

